TURNING CYBERPOWER INTO IDEA POWER

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN US STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

BY

KACI COLE

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND
SPACE STUDIES FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

AIR UNIVERSITY

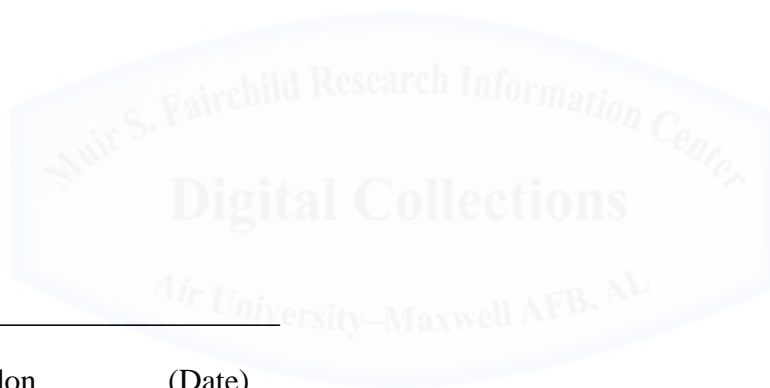MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

JUNE 2011

APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

_____

Colonel Michael V. Smith   (Date)

_____

Dr John B. Sheldon   (Date)

DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MAJ Kaci H. Cole is a 1997 graduate of the United States Military Academy. After an Infantry Branch detail assignment in Korea, MAJ Cole attended the Military Intelligence Officer's Transition course and Captain's Career Course at Ft Huachuca Arizona. While assigned to the 25TH Infantry Division MAJ Cole served in positions from Company to Division level including deployments to Afghanistan as an Infantry Battalion S2 and Military Intelligence Company Commander and to Iraq as the G2 Operations officer. Most recently, MAJ Cole attended the Air Command and Staff School at Maxwell AFB Alabama.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

The United States is currently engaged in a struggle to counter the effects of violent extremist ideology. Heavy use of the military component of national power eliminated the immediate danger but also validated the threat ideology. Initial US actions failed to address the underlying causes and some argue increased the pool of individuals susceptible to violent extremist ideology. Strategic communications supports other national instruments of power in this struggle but can also attack the underlying ideology. The US communicates with multiple audiences through various forms of media, both traditional and emerging. Social media may present an opportunity for US strategic communications efforts to reach an expanding audience, from which violent extremists are also trying to recruit. Like any other instrument, effective use of social media requires a thorough understanding of the capabilities and limitations. Determining the role of social media in the overall US strategic communications efforts requires identifying methods to use and assessing the effects of the medium.

CONTENTS

Introduction

There are real and permanent social dilemmas, which can only be optimized for, never completely solved.

Clay Shirky

The United States is currently engaged in a struggle to counter the effects of violent extremist ideology. A heavy application of the military component of national power eliminated the immediate danger after 2001, but also validated key facets of the threat ideology. Initial US actions failed to address the underlying causes and in some cases increased the pool of individuals susceptible to violent extremist ideology. Strategic communications support the national instruments of power in this struggle, but can also attack the underlying ideology. If social media presents an opportunity to influence the opinions of the audience, then perhaps it may provide benefits for the US similar to those enjoyed by commercial enterprises.

Both the US government and commercial firms seek to establish a relationship with their constituents or customers. The story of Whole Foods Market provides an example of how one commercial enterprise harnessed the power of social media. According to an interview of Maria Erwin, the Interactive Art Director for Whole Foods Market, the retailer's initial social media outreach focused on Twitter.[1] "We just wanted to connect with people." says Erwin when asked about the company's goals.[2] "[Twitter] was a good way for us to communicate,… to let people know some things about us that maybe they didn't realize…"[3] The goal of this commercial company sounds very similar to the mission of the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) at the US State Department.[4] The

---

[1] Michael Stelnzer, "Reaching Millions With Twitter: The Whole Foods Story," *Social Media Examiner* 9 Feburary 2010, http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/reaching-millions-with-twitter-the-whole-foods-story/ (23 March 2011).

[2] Stelnzer, "Reaching Millions With Twitter: The Whole Foods Story,"

[3] ———, "Reaching Millions With Twitter: The Whole Foods Story,"

[4] David Queen, Deputy Director Digital Outreach Team, Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, U.S. Department of State, interview conducted by phone 5 May 2011.
The Digital Outreach Team (DOT) has moved from the Bureau of International Information Programs to the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. However, the mission remains the same per e-mail from Mr David Queen received on 29 April 2011 and phone interview on 5 May 2011. "The DOT

similarity between the communication goals of the private and public sectors indicates that commercial marketing techniques may serve the government mission as well.

Whole foods started the social media efforts with some initial website content. User-generated content, such as recipe reviews and product ratings, provided value to audience members that encountered the site as a result of social media interactions.[5] From humble beginnings using only modest resources, Whole Foods Market now boasts 1.7 million Twitter followers and more than 175,000 Facebook fans in just over one year.[6] According to Erwin, the majority of these followers found Whole Foods Market though viral dissemination on Twitter and Facebook.[7] The key to the Whole Foods Market model is providing useful content, inviting the audience to become involved in the conversation, and using these interactions to draw users to other content. Could US strategic communications efforts follow the same model?

Perhaps integration of social media into the overall US strategic communications effort could provide influence in areas not yet fully exploited. The US communicates with multiple audiences through various forms of media both traditional and emerging. **Social media may present an opportunity for US strategic communications efforts to reach an expanding audience, from which violent extremists are also trying to recruit**. However, like any other instrument, effective use of social media requires a thorough understanding of the capabilities and limitations.

What is Social Media?

The use of communications technology, such as the Internet and data-enabled mobile phones, that many use to compose and exchange user-generated content on a large scale, created a new element of culture commonly called social media. Instead of person-to-person contact, social media allows person-to-many contact where content is stored in an interactive environment without a requirement for physical location or temporal frame. In contrast, the telephone does not store conversations for future review and requires

---

explains U.S. foreign policy, provides accurate descriptions of U.S. society and life, and counters misinformation."

[5] Stelnzer, "Reaching Millions With Twitter: The Whole Foods Story,"

[6] ———, "Reaching Millions With Twitter: The Whole Foods Story,"

[7] ———, "Reaching Millions With Twitter: The Whole Foods Story,"

synchronization between sender and receiver.[8] Television and radio have similar

limitations. Broadcast mediums do allow one-to-many contact, but have much higher

associated costs than social media precluding individual creation and dissemination of

content. Furthermore, the transmission is largely one-way.[9] "The dominant feature of

radio and television is the capability to reach broadly over an area and, accordingly,

provide [one way communication of] information simultaneously to a very large

audience."[10] Call-in shows limit the number of people involved in the conversation and

the speed of the exchange. The majority of radio audience members who call-in find

busy signals and the screening process further narrows the list.[11] Relatively few audience

members actually receive airtime and when they do, the show host controls the

dialogue.[12] Two radio callers cannot then carry on a conversation outside of the show as

is possible with social media. The print media format also includes constraints that

inhibit interactive dialogue.[13] Newspapers do allow some interaction and ongoing

conversation in their editorial pages but only print a few of the received submissions.

Newspapers store content, but cannot link individual items into coherent conversations.

Traditional media offers some of the same attributes, but social media combines

attributes to accelerate the dialogue and possibly the transformation of beliefs, opinions,

and attitudes.

Social media facilitates communication beyond the physical and temporal

boundaries of traditional media. The merger of multiple communications technologies

supporting the production, transmission, and storage of content provides conduits for

delivery directly to individuals. States are no longer able to regulate the flow of

---

[8] Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 157. Shirky describes how phone conversations have a higher transaction cost because the sender and the receiver must be synchronized.

[9] Franklin D. Kramer and Larry K. Wentz, "Cyber Influence and International Security," in *Cyberpower and National Security*, ed. Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr, and Larry K. Wentz (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009), 345.

[10] Kramer and Wentz, "Cyber Influence and International Security," 345.

[11] Jeffrey A. Dvorkin, "How to Get on 'Talk of the Nation'," 25 April 2006 http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5363084 (23 March 2011).

[12] Lieutenant Colonel Eric Nelson, USAF provided the idea that the show host controls the dialogue.

[13] Lieutenant Colonel Eric Nelson, USAF provided the wording.

information without resorting to draconian measures.[14] In this sense, social media may qualify as a disruptive technology because it opens the state system to new users and modes of interaction.[15] With all of these positive attributes, social media is also difficult to control. Additionally only one third of the worldwide population has access to the Internet limiting the potential audience.[16] Social media performs many of the same functions as traditional media, making it difficult to define.

A Definition of Social Media

Definitions for social media vary widely. In broad terms, social media exist on the Internet and rely on the use of communications technology. Social media encompass a family of Internet-based applications. These applications provide the tools to create content. In other words, they allow for the recording of ideas and expressions of creativity that remain available for later consumption or modification. The applications and the communications technology thus serve as the conduits for exchange of the created content. Finally, individual users, as opposed to commercial and government entities, create the content in this interactive system. Considering these characteristics, a reasonable definition for social media is a family of Internet-based applications that allow for the creation, exchange, and storage of user-generated content.[17] This definition provides a basis to consider the integration and role of social media in the overall US strategic communications effort.

Methodology

---

[14] Jeff and Liegh Armistead Malone, "Speaking Out of Both Sides of Your Mouth: Approaches to Perception Management in Washington, D.C. and Canberra," in *Information Warfare: Separating Hype From Reality*, ed. E. Leigh Armistead (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2007), 140.

[15] John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, 1997), 26.

[16] ICT Facts and Figures, The World in 2010, http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/FactsFigures2010.pdf (accessed 2 May 2011), 4. The ICT estimates that 71 percent of the population in the developed world has access to the Internet but only 21 percent of the population in the developing world has access. The percentage in the developing nations is increasing but still below the worldwide average of 30 percent.

[17] A number of sources provided material to form this definition. Elihu Zimet and Edward Skoudis, "A Graphical Introduction to the Structural Elements of Cyberspace," in *Cyberpower and National Security*, ed. Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr, and Larry K. Wentz (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009), 109; Edward Skoudis, "Evolutionary Trends in Cyberspace," in *Cyberpower and National Security*, ed. Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr, and Larry K. Wentz (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009), 168; Gerard J. Christman, "Facilitating Stability Operations with Cyberpower," in *Cyberpower and National Security*, ed. Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr, and Larry K. Wentz (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009), 402; Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 55, 81, 99.

There is no doubt that the use of social media is growing, but what are the implications of this growth for US strategic communications? The overall goal of this research is to determine if US investment in social media will produce influence that is worth the costs. If traditional media reaches a larger audience than social media, investment of resources in the new conduit may not provide the desired results. Perhaps weighing the cost and benefits of investment in social media requires a longer vision. Traditional media currently reaches a larger audience but the growth of the social media audience promises to dwarf the current reach of primarily broadcast means. Furthermore, the analysis cost incurred for the level of influence achieved should weigh the immediate and lasting effects that each medium delivers. The following analysis compares traditional media to social media to determine what characteristics transfer and what is unique. The challenges of defining social media, the lack of long-term studies of its impact on society, and continued change in technologies and applications complicate the task of determining the medium's utility in strategic communications. Even with these challenges to the task ahead, it is possible to derive some implications for the future of US strategic communications in social media.

Structure

To this end, the intent of chapter 1 is to determine the legal and ethical questions associated with traditional media influence operations and how these laws apply to social media. Determining what is legal and ethical within social media likely requires a synthesis of precedents in traditional strategic communications and emerging cyberspace practices. After clearing the legal hurdle, chapter 2 explores how social media influence works with two central questions. First, how does a traditional medium, such as television or radio, change ideas? Second, does social media offer the same opportunity to use underlying cognitive and social mechanisms for influence?

At this point, if the analysis determines that the use of social media for influence is legal and ethical and that traditional media influence mechanisms transfer to social media then attention will turn to the appropriate tactics. Traditional media communication campaigns use a variety of tactics, which may or may not transfer to social media. Chapter 3 looks at tactics and methods in use with traditional media and compares the characteristics that support the use of these tactics and methods with the

characteristics of social media. The argument in chapter 3 asserts that the best tactics to use in social media include those that work best in traditional media with characteristics similar to social media.

The limits of Internet access dictate the potential reach for social media. Within the population that social media can reach, only selected audiences provide potential for influence. The challenge of selecting the appropriate audience for strategic communications in social media forms the core of chapter 4. The central argument of this chapter holds that overt engagement proves better than covert engagement in the long-term. Covert engagement, however, remains integral to the overall strategic communications campaign. Covert engagement generates information that supports intelligence collection, proactive overt engagement, and information that aides the development of counter themes and messages. The chapter also explores the question of which segment of the audience to engage. Should strategic communications through social media engage with a wide audience to inoculate them from violent extremist ideas, or target the individuals spreading violent extremist ideology? Finally, the argument in chapter 4 holds that the current growth of connectivity for Internet audiences supports the strategic utility of using social media to influence foreign audiences.

Planning for strategic communications includes designing the assessment mechanism to monitor progress and provide feedback to improve themes and messages. In chapter 5, the focus turns to assessing the effects of social media influence operations. Traditional media assessments will likely provide a good starting point to measure the impacts of social media where the underlying characteristics are similar. Social media provides the opportunity for direct observation of the audience in an interactive environment at less cost while avoiding some of the response and selection bias associated with traditional methods.

Chapter 6 focuses on the practical application of social media in the overall US strategic communications effort and overcoming the significant challenges involved. Social media may provide opportunities for the US to create centers of influence or encourage existing indigenous centers of influence. Physical events may then provide an opportunity for social media influence to spread to other layers of the information environment. Finally, the conclusion will draw some implications for the future use of

social media in the overall strategic communications effort and summarize the case for their strategic utility.

Sources

Literature on traditional media communications, commercial marketing, and the social sciences provide a wealth of background information to support this research. Books and journals in addition to newspapers and magazines detail the methods for strategic communications and how it works. Some of traditional media procedures and considerations will likely transfer to social media, based on common characteristics. Other areas, for example exploring the legal and ethical aspects, may require a synthesis of traditional legal precedent with emerging cyberspace practices. Finally, interviews provide some key insights to current US strategic communications efforts in social media.

Challenges

The challenges to this research include the lack of established practice for strategic communications in social media and the concentration of the emerging practice in the developed world. Will other societies adopt social media and use it the same way as western societies? Commercial firms and communications specialists continue to discover new applications, uses, and effects of social media that like the cyberspace infrastructure that supports it remain ill-defined.

Social Media in Current Efforts

United States strategic communications efforts span nearly every type of media with varying ranges of intended audiences. From the in-country programs of ambassadors engaging with local populations to international mass communications efforts, the US Government attempts to understand and communicate with individuals across the globe. Some types of media offer greater reach and scope, while others provide focused conduits to selected audiences. Selecting a desired audience is the first difficulty, but ensuring that the selected audience—and only that audience—receives the intended message presents an even greater challenge. Measuring the effects of these efforts, and the ability to reach the intended audience while avoiding harmful spillover, varies by medium. Social media, one component of the US strategic communications

effort, offers focused access to a growing range of audiences with potentially lower risk and cost than other methods.

To date, strategic communications efforts focused on changing ideas, preventing the spread of violent extremist ideology, and blocking recruitment for violent extremist groups remains relatively small. Digital outreach efforts fall into two general categories. One model actively searches third-party sites and engages to counter misperceptions and misrepresentation of US policy as well as counter violent extremist ideology. The other model provides peripheral content such as spots coverage to attract an audience to core content and platforms to encourage conversation between audience members.

The Digital Outreach Team (DOT), a subcomponent of the International Information Bureau of the United States Department of State, consists of eleven members; ten analysts in three languages, and one team leader.[18] Operating in a reactive mode, the DOT monitors a variety of websites and posts counter points where they find erroneous or inflammatory information[19]. Currently no plans exist for the team to expand or to change their methods of operations to a proactive model.[20] Collectively, they post about one hundred messages per week on twenty-five to thirty websites.[21] Messages posted by the DOT analysts generate some interest with about 30 reply posts on average per posting, however, their efforts become lost in a sea of social media traffic.[22] This small volume is no match for the thousands of individuals spreading violent extremist ideology on social media sites. On the military side, a team at United States Central

---

[18]Daniel Schuman, Deputy Director Digital Outreach Team, Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, interview conducted by phone 17 November 2010. Since the interview, the DOT moved to the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications.

[19] Daniel Schuman, interview.

[20]Daniel Schuman, interview; David Queen, Deputy Director Digital Outreach Team, Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, U.S. Department of State, interview conducted by phone 5 May 2011. While there were no known expansion plans at the time of the interview with Mr. Schuman the move of the DOT to the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications increased the priority for resources. The DOT is expanding with plans to hire five additional Arabic and 3 Urdu analysis. Additionally, the DOT plans to add 2 Somali analysts.

[21] United States Department of State, "The IIP Digital Outreach Team," January 2009, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/116709.pdf (23 January 2011). The document Mr. Schuman sent via e-mail reflects updated numbers. The online source has not been updated to reflect the changes.

[22] Daniel Schuman, interview.

Command operates in a similar fashion, engaging to oppose extreme views.[23] Other US regional and functional commands such as USAFRICOM and USSOCOM host news aggregation and community forum sites intended to provide information and encourage interaction between members of the audience.[24] These efforts represent only a small portion of the US strategic communications efforts, but have the potential for greater impact with the injection of additional resources. The audience for extremist ideology is extremely large in comparison to the relatively low level of effort the US Government is investing to counter violent extremist influence in social media.[25]

Influence begins at the local level by sending messages targeted to a specific language, culture, socioeconomic, and political demographic to create ideological resonance.[26] Social media allows the sender to gather information about a specific audience and easily publish multiple messages tailored to individuals without the cost and bleed-over of traditional media.

Can social media change ideas? This work seeks to determine the appropriate role of social media in US strategic communication efforts to counter violent extremism. The initial expectation prior to examining the question (the hypothesis) is that the US should increase the use of social media to decrease risk and cost of strategic communications while increasing options for reaching a growing audience with greater specificity. Ultimately, the implications derived from a study of the above question aim to support, refute, or qualify this assertion.

---

[23] Howard Altman, "Central Command Uses Social Media to Respond to 'Enemy Propaganda'," *The Tampa Tribune* 22 October 2010, http://www2.tbo.com/ (8 December 2011).
[24] LTC Stephanie Jung (Chief, Operations Branch US Africa Command IO Division, Kelley Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany) phone interview by the author, 11 May 2011.

[25] The US may have additional covert or non-attribution resources involved on the information operations side of strategic communications. The current overt interactive efforts in social media, both the DOT at the DOS and the Digital Engagement Team (DET) at USCENTCOM operate under public diplomacy authority. The core mission of both teams is to inform not to influence and both ensure all posts clearly identify their employment as members of the US government. Other geographic combatant commands overt social media communications efforts operate primarily as broadcast platforms.
[26] James J. F. Forest and Frank III Honkus, "Introduction," in *Influence Warfare: How Terrorists and Governments Fight to Shape Perceptions in a War of Ideas*, ed. James J. F. Forest (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009), 5.

Chapter 1

Legal and Ethical Considerations for Social Media

Have I done the world good, or have I added a menace?
                                                              -- Guglielmo Marconi

Using social media to influence citizens of another nation presents a complex legal problem. Multiple bodies of law may apply, including US domestic laws, international law, the laws of the selected nation, and the laws of any intermediate nations if the data passes through their information infrastructure.[1] Political leaders and legal experts do not yet understand the full legal implications of cyberspace. Even among cyberspace experts, definitions of cyberspace and the activities that occur through and within the medium vary widely.[2] Even more difficult is determining where government use of social media fits in a legal paradigm. The use of traditional media to influence foreign audiences during the Cold War provides a precedent. Cultural centers in 125 countries supported by the US Information Agency (USIA) and the Voice of America broadcasts formed a person-to-person soft sell campaign to oppose international communism.[3] After the Cold War, decisions by Congress folded the USIA into the State Department where the legal authority for influence operations currently resides.[4]

Domestic Law

Domestic law gives the Department of State (DOS) the authority to explain US foreign policy to an international audience, counter misinformation, and to "articulate the importance of freedom, democracy, and human rights as fundamental principles underlying United States foreign policy goals."[5] While this establishes the authority of the DOS to engage in a reactive mode, it does not specify what if any authority the statue

---

[1] Thomas C. Wingfield, "International Law and Information Operations," in *Cyberpower and National Security*, ed. Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr, and Larry K. Wentz (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009), 541.

[2] Daniel T. Kuehl, "From Cyberspace to Cyberpower: Defining the Problem," in *Cyberpower and National Security*, ed. Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr, and Larry K. Wentz (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009), 26-27.

[3] Elizabeth C. Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, New Millennium Books in International Studies (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 113.

[4] Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, 113.

[5] *U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, Public Law 80-402, U.S. Code 22 (1948)*.

extends to actively seek to change the minds of adversary or neutral populations[6]. The DOS sells the virtues of US society, however, the current conflict over ideas may require selling the virtues of a sustainable government and behavior that promotes social stability as opposed to standard western democratic values. The (Department of Defense DOD) authority in the arena of ideas is even more limited.

Title X, US Codes provides the DOD limited authority to conduct Psychological operations[7] (PSYOP), where such operations shape the operating environment in support of specific missions. The statute does not specify what PSYOP is, nor does it distinguish between PSYOP and public diplomacy.[8] DOD policy limits PSYOP by prohibiting operations from deliberately influencing US audiences.[9] When positive stories intended to influence public opinion in Iraq migrated to US news sources, the controversy reignited the debate over separation of public affairs and information operations.[10] The Lincoln Group used truthful information, but attributed the source to the editorial staff of Iraqi newspapers.[11] Ultimately, revelation of this legal practice called into question the credibility of all US government information sources in Iraq.[12] While no law prohibits the use of covert influence on selected foreign audiences, Patrick Butler, vice president of the International Center for Journalists said "[y]ou show the world you're not living by the principles you profess to believe in, and you lose all credibility."[13] Even beyond strictly legal limits, Joint Doctrine directs Information Operations to remain consistent

---

[6] This sentence attempts to draw a distinction between the work of the DOS to influence representatives of a foreign government and direct appeals to the population of a foreign nation.

[7] United States Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms Joint Publication 1-02*, 12 April 2001. JP 1-02 defines Psychological Operations as "[p]lanned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator's objectives."

[8] Daniel Silverberg and Col Joseph Heimann, "An Ever-Expanding War: Legal Aspects of Online Strategic Communication," *Parameters* vol 39 no 2 (2009): 80.

[9] Charles J Dunlap Jr., "The Law and the Human Target in Information Warfare: Cautions and Opportunities," in *Cyberwar 3.0: Human Factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, ed. Alan D. Campen and Douglas H. Dearth (Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 2000), 144.

[10] Walter E. Richter, "The Future of Information Operations," *Military Review* vol 89 no 1 (2009): 110.

[11] Richter, "The Future of Information Operations," 110.

[12] ———, "The Future of Information Operations," 110.

[13] Jeff Gerth and Shane Scott, "U.S. Is Said to Pay to Plant Articles in Iraq Papers," *The New York Times* 2005.

with societal values and in accordance with fundamental human rights.[14] In the current conflict, the US government places greater reliance on the DOD to conduct missions beyond the traditional scope of war. As a result, PSYOP, once limited to the support of specific missions, has grown to support general theater-level strategic communications.[15] Due to the limits of Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), domestic laws, and US policy, a greater reliance on the DOD for influence operations may limit US capabilities. Additionally, this growth of mission creates an uneasy relationship with the DOS and may push the DOD beyond its domestic legal authority.[16] Regardless of which agency performs the mission, US domestic law supports the use of government resources to influence the ideas and opinions of foreign audiences with certain limitations.[17] The overall intent is to inform the audience with the content of the messages being truthful. Additionally, the association with the US government remains overt with all actions clearly attributed. If domestic law supports the ability of the government to influence international audiences, how does international law treat this matter? Is the use of social media to influence the internal affairs of another sovereign nation legal?

International Law

The DOD typically uses the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) to measure the legality and justification of actions. The LOAC, derived from customary international law, in addition to the Hague and Geneva Conventions, applies to armed conflict between nations. LOAC does not extend the rights and obligations equally from the state to the individual level. For example, individuals cannot declare war on each other and thereby enjoy immunity from prosecution that would cover the actions of a member of a military service on a battlefield. Similarly, states cannot declare war against individuals or groups in order to ignore domestic law and excuse an escalation of violence even when the individuals commit war like acts. LOAC prohibits perfidy, such as feigning surrender, but allows the use of ruses to influence adversaries as long as they do not feign a

---

[14] United States Department of Defense, *Information Operations Joint Publication 3-13*, 13 February 2006, I-6.
[15] Silverberg and Heimann, "An Ever-Expanding War: Legal Aspects of Online Strategic Communication," 81.
[16] ———, "An Ever-Expanding War: Legal Aspects of Online Strategic Communication," 79.
[17] Title 22 USC Section 6201, Congressional findings and declaration of purposes, uses Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to support US policy advocating access "to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers[.]"

protected status.[18] Combatants may use lies under LOAC as long as these actions do not constitute perfidy.[19] The same rules regulating conduct in war between nations do not translate well to circumstances where a state of war does not exist. LOAC requires combatants to protect noncombatants; however, neutral parties are the very audience that the US may seek to influence to gain an advantage over an adversary.

Any military action must take the principles of discrimination and proportionality into account. When civilian audiences overlap with belligerents, making a determination of discrimination and proportionality for an influence operation becomes problematic.[20] Influence messages often reach unintended audiences, causing collateral effects. Influence operations, if considered in the same way as other acts of war, would routinely violate the principles of discrimination and proportionality.[21] Furthermore, because the effects of information are less tangible than physical effects, proving compliance with these principles after the fact requires subjective judgment. These factors increase the level of personal risk military commanders take when approving influence operations. Individuals with different subjective judgments may decide that a commander's actions violated the LOAC after the fact. For these reasons, some legal scholars find the trend of more DOD involvement and the tone of recent Psychological Operations Doctrine troubling.[22] This does not mean that influence operations are not lawful, just that the DOD should concentrate on influence operations during declared conflicts that target only enemy combatants.

If cyberspace actions do not fit well into existing international customs and laws then possibly revisions are in order. Some believe so and advocate for a separate set of

---

[18] Duncan B. Hollis, "Why States Need an International Law for Information Operations," *Lewis and Clark Law Review* 11, no. 4 (2007): 1044.

[19] Dunlap Jr., "The Law and the Human Target in Information Warfare: Cautions and Opportunities," 144.

[20] ———, "The Law and the Human Target in Information Warfare: Cautions and Opportunities," 141.

[21] ———, "The Law and the Human Target in Information Warfare: Cautions and Opportunities," 141. In his discussion and examples, Dunlap covers computer network attack and computer network exploitation; however, influence messages may result in effects similar to kinetic weapons. Dunlap asserts that there is a "growing consensus" in international law circles that favors judging electronic means by their effects.

[22] United States Department of Defense, *Psychological Operations Joint Publication 3-13.2*, 07 January 2010, I-3, I-5. Joint Publication 3-13.2 refers to using PSYOPS when civilian agencies are in the lead as well as during peacetime to influence foreign audiences. In these cases, public diplomacy is arguably a more appropriate application of US influence to avoid identification with military force.

rules to govern influence operations that bridge the gap between peace and war.[23] Law professor Susan W. Brenner develops definitions for three types of cyberspace activities.[24] Cybercrime and cyberterrorism both involve "activity that threatens a society's ability to maintain internal order" and cyberwar involves nation states "achieving advantages over competing nation-states[s] or preventing a competing nation-state from achieving advantages over them."[25] Under these definitions, individuals or groups using social media to instigate change in other nations might be labeled cybercriminals and cyberterrorists. If a nation state uses social media in an attempt to change opinion in another sovereign nation, such action, Brenner believes, constitutes an act or war.[26] These distinctions may make sense for cyberspace activities that attack information infrastructure, but they do not make sense in the case of using social media to change ideas. These definitions are mainly concerned with the consequences and not the intent of the action. Placing the use of social media to change ideas in the proper context, requires consideration of both the intent and the consequences. Cybercriminals intend to profit, cyberterrorsitst intend to change behavior using random violence, and cyberwarriors intend to achieve victory using controlled violence. In contrast, overt attributed strategic communications through social media seeks to achieve better mutual understanding. The dialogue is open to the public and the source remains transparent. The intent of strategic communications to influence a foreign audience remains non-threatening, however, the consequences may threaten a nation's ability to maintain internal control.

Threats, and how to mitigate them, currently dominate cyberspace debates. Using social media to change ideas is better understood as exploitation of the cyberspace medium to extend traditional strategic communication and diplomacy. To reinforce the characterization of attempts to influence through social media as diplomacy instead of war, the DOS should lead these efforts. As David Kilcullen emphasizes, "[m]ilitarizing

---

[23] Hollis, "Why States Need an International Law for Information Operations," 1023.

[24] Susan W. Brenner, ""At Light Speed": Attribution and Response to Cybercrime/Terrorism/Warfare," *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* 97, no. 2: 386, 401.

[25] Brenner, ""At Light Speed": Attribution and Response to Cybercrime/Terrorism/Warfare," 386, 401.

[26] ———, ""At Light Speed": Attribution and Response to Cybercrime/Terrorism/Warfare," 399-401. Brenner distinguishes between cybercrime, cyberterrorism, and cyberwar based on intent. The intent of communications in social media is to change opinions of the foreign populace and thereby derive an advantage over a foreign government. This intent in Brenner's definition is warfare.

IO would be a severe mistake, which would confuse a part (military operations) with the whole (US national strategy) and so undermine the overall policy."[27] The DOD may need to create competencies in this area in response to a current growth of irregular conflicts; however, military involvement in influence operations increases the perception of threat.

Social media is just one aspect of cyberspace, an operating environment that continues to resist clear definition. As scholars debate and definitions change, exploitation of social media remains constrained mainly by self-defined limits.[28] Some scholars believe that the US should advocate for changes in the status quo, arguing in favor of a new international law for information operations. The benefits of such changes remain uncertain. The adoption of a new legal regime will likely constrain US actions and limit communications options, while non-state actors will remain unfettered.

The lack of constraints in the current environment permits exploitation of the full capabilities and reveals the limitations of the medium. If rules are developed, the US will benefit from a clearer understanding of which rules to adopt and which to oppose. Establishing clearly defined rules in the present might highlight current US exploitation of social media and be seen as a threat to which other nations might feel compelled to respond, thus creating a security dilemma. Ambiguity allows exploitation without arousing condemnation from the world community or obligating competitors to respond. Other nations may also exploit the domain for their own purposes to the detriment of the US; however, ambiguity allows the US to choose both if and when to respond. A defined threshold would require a US response to send a clear signal in order to retain deterrence value. A limit undefended reduces the credibility of all other limits a state sets because

---

[27] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 300; *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms Joint Publication 1-02*, 225. US joint military doctrine defines Information Operations as "[t]he integrated employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own." Kilcullen's use of IO implies an emphasis on the related capabilities and includes neutral as well as adversary audiences.

[28] Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Eliot Howard, and Peter Paret, *On war* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 76. Clausewitz finds that "the social conditions of the states" and "their relationships to one another ... are the forces … [that] circumscribe and moderate [war]." The conclusion that "each will drive its opponent toward extremes" is likely only where an existential threat exists, which is not the case with the current violent extremist threat.

deterrence requires capability and the will to employ the capability.[29] Therefore, setting a defined limit requires a deterrent to defend it. Deterrence relies on the enemy perception of the friendly capability and will to retaliate when provoked.[30] Bernard Brodie notes that credibility was the central problem for the US doctrine of massive retaliation when faced with limited aggression.[31] Forces reserved for retaliation must prepare for the failure of deterrence because the use of these forces strengthens the credibility of deterrence.[32] A state that sets a defined limit is then obligated to defend the limit in order to maintain the credibility of deterrence. Furthermore, deterrence assumes that adversaries posses assets to place at risk. Additionally, setting a limit may obligate a nation to a response leading to costs out of proportion with the adversary's demands.[33] In the end, defined limits in policy pronouncements and treaties constrain the choices available to sovereign nations and may obligate them to actions beyond those initially threatened.

Current international law concentrates on discouraging the use of force that leads to military conflict. "[Mi]litary coercion [is] discouraged, with a very low threshold for prohibited activity, while diplomatic, economic, or political coercion [is not] discouraged by the UN Charter, because they amount to a peaceful alternative to war."[34] This formulation does not take into account the capacity to inflict physical damage through cyberspace. Lieutenant Colonel Michael N. Schmitt advocates using a quantitative scale to account for the lack of clearly discernable physical signatures of cyberspace action that would include social media influence operations.[35] Schmitt aptly summarizes the analysis underlying the current international law and why it may need to change:

> In the current normative scheme, the consequences of an act are often less important than its nature. For instance, a devastating economic embargo is not a "use of force" nor an "armed attack" justifying forcible self-

---

[29] Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge,: Harvard University Press, 1960), 187. Schelling writes that if "the opponent fails to heed the threat, and the thereafter chooses not to carry it out, he only confirms his opponent's belief that when he has a clear choice to act or to abstain he will choose to abstain..."

[30] Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 13.

[31] Bernard Brodie, *Strategy In The Missile Age*, RAND ed. (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp., 2007), 273.

[32] Brodie, *Strategy In The Missile Age*, 272.

[33] ———, *Strategy In The Missile Age*, 67-68.

[34] Wingfield, "International Law and Information Operations," 526.

[35] ———, "International Law and Information Operations," 527.

defense, even though the embargo may result in enormous suffering. On
the other hand, a relatively minor, armed incursion across a border is both
a use of force and an armed attack. This contrary result derives from the
law's use of "acts" as cognitive short-hand for what really matters –
consequences. Acts are more easily expressed (to "use force" versus to
cause a certain quantum and quality of harm) and more easily discerned
than an effects-based standard, on the harm suffered. This cognitive short-
hand does not work well in the age of information operations because
information attacks, albeit potentially disastrous, may be physically
imperceptible. Thus, as the nature of a hostile act becomes less
determinative of its consequences, current notions of "lawful" coercive
behavior by states, and the appropriate responses thereto, are likely to
evolve accordingly.[36]

While the debate continues over how the accepted practices should change to
account for the emerging capabilities of the information age, the current international law
favors the use of non-violent means such as social media.[37] A small military incursion
would bring quick international condemnation where a pervasive social media campaign
to directly influence the internal affairs of another nation would not. The legality of
actions to influence adversary or neutral audiences using social media is ambiguous;
however, international law favors covert nonviolent means over the use of force.

While international law is silent on matters concerning covert attempts to
influence adversary ideas, to paraphrase Liddell Hart, victory is less desirable than a
better state of peace in the current ideological conflict.[38] Stable ideological coexistence,
where compatible basic values exist, benefits US security more than ideological
domination that might collapse or require great expense to maintain. Covert operations
require security that becomes difficult to maintain over time. A compromise of covert
influence operations could reverse any gain achieved previously. According to
Kinniburgh and Denning "[p]eople do not like being deceived, and the price of being

---

[36] Michael N. Schmitt, "Bellum Americanum: the U.S. View of Twenty-First Century War and Its Possible
Implications for the Law of Armed Conflict " *Michigan Journal of International Law* 19 (1998): 1071-1072.
[37] Mark R. Shulman, *Legal Constraints on Information Warfare* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Center for
Strategy and Technology Air War College Air University, 1999), 14. Shulman explains that the principle of
humanity favors the non-violent means if the alternative would likely result in "greater physical
destruction and loss of life."
[38] Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Meridian, 1991), 353. Liddell
Hart observes that "[i]f you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after-effect, you
may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one,
containing the germs of another war." Adversary discovery of deception after a victory is likely to
contribute to another conflict in the future.

exposed is the loss of credibility and trust."[39] Pratkanis also agrees noting that "black propaganda," defined as "messages that appear to come from a source other than the communicator, … have an inherent risk: the detection of [deceptive tactics] will serve to undermine trust and thus jeopardize the acceptance of other messages."[40] The work of Pratkanis indicates that even if it is legally justifiable, a covert approach promises less advantage than open efforts to change ideas and opinions of our adversary and neutral population susceptible to violent extremist ideology.

Summary

In summary, despite the absence of clear legal and ethical rules regarding the use of social media for influence operations, the employment of social media by agents of the US government for the purpose of influencing international audiences appears to be legally justifiable. Domestic law supports the export of US influence primarily by the DOS and in times of conflict by the DOD. International law, while ambiguous on the use of cyberspace, favors non-violent means of political discourse over the use of force. In order to avoid the perception of threats and to remove unnecessary restrictions and ambiguity, the DOS should serve as the center for US influence efforts instead of the DOD. The DOD should develop and retain capabilities for information operations, but the use of such capabilities should focus on support to combat operations and influencing enemy combatants. The US should continue to exploit cyberspace by using social media to communicate with and to influence foreign audiences. However, "[i]f an influence agent uses deceit, trickery, or other means of persuasion that are incompatible with democratic values, the effort is likely to produce resentment, lack of trust, reactance, and ultimately more damage than good for the cause."[41] Following the prescription of Pratkanis, US efforts to exploit social media should remain overt because attributed actions hold the best prospects for long-term success.

---

[39] James Kinniburgh and Dorothy Elizabeth Robling Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", JSOU Press, 2006, https://jsou.socom.mil/JSOU%20Publications/JSOU06-5kenniburgdenningBlog_final.pdf, 16 March 2011, 20.

[40] Anthony R. Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," in *Information Strategy and Warfare: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, ed. John Arquilla and Douglas A. Borer (New York: Routledge, 2009), 66.

[41] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 80.

Chapter 2

Changing Ideas: from Traditional Media to Social Media

> *As our understanding of the history of technology increases, it becomes clear that a new device merely opens a door; it does not compel one to enter.*
>
> Lynn White Jr.

This chapter begins with the assumption that traditional mass media changes ideas. The commercial advertising world provides plenty of circumstantial evidence that mass media messages change the ideas and the habits of consumers. With this question set aside, the focus is on ways that traditional media changes ideas and asks if social media offers the same opportunities. This chapter isolates selected techniques in traditional media, investigates how these techniques change ideas, and how these techniques might apply to changing ideas through social media.

Commercial enterprises use traditional media to advertise products focusing on the segment in the population most likely to buy the products.[1] Commercial advertising incorporates music, eye-catching graphics, and rhymes designed to access the right side of the human brain.[2] Researchers believe that the right side of the brain, the locus of emotional activity and motivation, is also the gateway to long-term memory and lasting influence.[3] Social media efforts should focus on right brain activity where long lasting influence is possible. In addition to engaging the audience members directly in dialogue, social media offers communicators the opportunity to link their direct messages to a variety of multimedia offerings. Communicators can provide individual audience members links to videos, webpage content, interactive games, news feeds, and other sites tailored to the audience member characteristics revealed during the conversation. The

---

[1] Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 59. These tactics called segmentation and targeting focus on the most likely consumers. Firms conserve resources by not marketing to segments of the population not likely to purchase the product.

[2] Richard C. Maddock and Richard L. Fulton, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing* (Westport, Conn.: Quorum Books, 1996), 17; Paul Gallagher, "Strategic Communications for the War on Terrorism, Countering Middle-Eastern Anti-American Bias" (US Army War College, 2005), 8, 9.

[3] Maddock and Fulton, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 17.

information gathered during individual conversations contributes to the construction of audience segments that provide communicators a tool to construct and focus messages.

Businesses conserve resources by focusing efforts on a selected segment instead of advertising to a wide audience.[4] Branding, synchronization of advertising messages with the actions of the firm, supports the positioning of the company's core message in the mind of consumers.[5] A positioning statement addresses a specific audience, articulates the brand's promise, tells the consumer what goal the product helps them achieve, and provides reinforcement or a "reason to believe".[6] Commercial firms monitor the opinions of their target segment closely to ensure that the message remains effective and their product meets consumer desires.

Traditional methods such as surveys, polls, focus groups, and customer complaints provide the feedback that companies use to modify their branding and positioning strategies.[7] Companies are also beginning to use of the power of social media to gather information on their audience and as part of their branding and positioning to "harness the power of influencers."[8] Bloggers write about the products they use amplifying the message the company wants to send. Converting a small percentage of the market can potentially influence the behavior of the majority.[9] This change is likely limited to superficial consumer habits at the top of the societal pyramid but it nonetheless indicates the value of word of mouth messages.[10] Social media provides a conduit for marketing and a feedback tool to assess the effects of branding and positioning.[11]

---

[4] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 59.

[5] Stony Trent and James Doty III, "Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations," *Military Review* 85, no. 4 (2005): 71; Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 65.

[6] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 65.

[7] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 69.

[8] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 104.

[9] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 104.

[10] Religious beliefs and fundamental cultural or societal values change slowly because they reflect personal identity. Individuals do not identify with consumer habits and therefore, these behaviors are easier to influence.

[11] Trent and Doty III, "Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations," 74.

Through social media, companies can cultivate relationships with enthusiastic customers that others view as more credible than advertising. In the social media arena "[b]rutal honesty and independence are key requirements for … credibility."[12] The fact that the company does not appear to have control of the message reinforces the impact.

Transferring these techniques to US strategic communication efforts capitalizes on the importance of independent third party voices. Instead of controlling the message, US efforts may achieve greater effects by influencing a wider independent audience that then presents both sides with greater credibility. Presenting both sides of an argument proves most effective when approaching an audience that initially disagrees.[13] The power of the method to spread the brand overshadows the lack of message control. Using social media inserts the desired ideas into the everyday conversation of the selected audience. Repetition then reinforces the argument allowing the recipient to observe actions in their environment that validate or refute the ideas.[14] Validation of the ideas as consistent with actions then reinforces the brand identity. In addition to advertising, traditional media as a source of information also influences public opinion.

Public opinion interacts with traditional media both feeding and responding to the dominant news coverage. While traditional media seem to represent a wide spectrum of views, they cannot represent all views due to the limitations of each medium. The scarcity and cost of traditional media encourages the content providers to filter the content before broadcasting because they are interested in making a profit.[15] Commercial interests that support the media also exert a degree of influence on content.[16] The ideological leaning of the owners, writers, and presenters influence the presentation of the content.[17] The sponsors of the medium then choose where to place their advertisements, which also influences the content of the programming. Traditional media presents a sampling of all the available information forming "a context in which some opinions are

---

[12] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 107.

[13] Marvin Karlins and Herbert Irving Abelson, *Persuasion; How Opinions and Attitudes Are Changed*, 2d ed. (New York,: Springer Pub. Co., 1970), 22, 25, 26.

[14] Kramer and Wentz, "Cyber Influence and International Security," 348, 349.

[15] Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 64.

[16] Justin Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 40.

[17] Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 78.

more plausible than others."[18] Public opinions that conform to the dominant coverage gain strength whereas those that conflict become more difficult to justify.[19] Traditional media cannot dictate what individuals think, but by providing the majority of information that people think about, traditional media can set the agenda.[20] Polls and media interpretation of the results also influence the dominant public opinion.[21] Polls offer elected officials in a democracy the appearance of legitimacy in following the will of the people they represent.[22] In this way, polls support power, in part making, rather than just recording, the responses of individuals.[23] Yet how much do polls and influence of the media reflect the true importance of the issues to an individual? Lewis describes polling as asking individuals which luxury item they prefer when all choices are well beyond their means to acquire.[24] Often the ranking of the issues in polls does not reflect the reality of everyday life.

Traditional media influences individuals by providing the dominant framework that individuals use to "define and understand the world."[25] The operative factors that drive this process in traditional media belong to the human cognitive dimension. The Social media model, while different from traditional media, operates with the same exchange of information. If the violent extremists monopolize social media forums and construct the dominant framework then their opinions will seem more plausible than others. The US must challenge the presence of these influences in social media. This is a difficult prospect because social media interactions are best built person-to-person.

---

[18] ———, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, xii.

[19] ———, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, xii.

[20] William B. I. V. LTG Caldwell and et al., "Learning to Leverage New Media: The Israeli Defense Forces in Recent Conflicts," *Military Review* vol 89 no 3 (2009): 3; Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 16.

[21] Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, x.

[22] ———, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 5.

[23] Nathalie Sonck and Geert Loosveldt, "Making News Based on Public Opinion Polls: The Flemish Case," in *Public Opinion and the Challenges of the 21ST Century* (Berlin: 2007), 5; Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 11.

[24] Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 80.

[25] ———, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 84.

An ongoing relationship with the selected audience is the key to building trust and rapport. The time required to construct these person-to-person relationships limits the spread of effective engagement. Building a social media corps, that is employing large numbers of individuals to engage the selected audience, is not likely to succeed.[26] First, the model is impractical because the difficulty of employing and coordinating large numbers of individuals requires a bureaucracy to manage the effort. Second, the selected audience is likely to view the effort as a government intrusion into a space that the selected audience views as designed for individuals.[27] What the government cannot control it can influence through the work of others. Although small, the work of the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) at the DOS and the Digital Engagement Team (DET) at USCENTCOM plants seeds on the Internet. Research indicates that the selected audience assigns a higher level of credibility to these lower level members of the bureaucracy that to public affairs personnel.[28] Those in the audience that agree with the information presented pick up the seeds and broadcast them into other forums on the Internet. For those in the selected audience that disagree, challenging their views presents them and a latent watching audience with additional information to break the dominance of the violent extremist viewpoint. A third group potentially provides the most important and far-reaching influence on the selected audience. "Third party validators" who identify with and present the US perspective have the greatest effect when the selected audience accepts them as credible.[29] Quilliam, a British counter-extremism think tank co-founded by Maajid Nawaz and Ed Husain, is one example of a

---

[26] Deirdre Collings, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report* (US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, 2009), 36.

[27] Collings, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 36.

[28] Steven R. Corman, Aaron Hess, and Z. S. Justus, "Credibility in the Global War on Terrorism: Strategic Principles and Research Agenda", Arizona State University, 9 June 2006, http://comops.org/article/117.pdf, 9 May 2011, 13.

[29] Collings, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 29; Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, 1st Back Bay pbk. ed. (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002), 259. Malcom Gladwell writes, "Simply by finding and reaching those few special people who hold so much social power, we can shape the course of social epidemics." Using Gladwell's work provides a perspective of violent extremism as a social epidemic like teenage pregnancy, drug use, or racism.

third party validator.[30] While not a religious organization, Quilliam is dedicated to, "being faithful to the basic tenets of Islam."[31] Using Islam as the basis for opposition to violent extremism, third party validators reduce the power of adversary's ideological recruiting techniques.[32] This approach describes a model that provides an effect at a low cost. However, this model also requires accepting a high level of risk. The US does not control the ideas that third parties present to the selected audience.[33] In fact, in order to maintain credibility, third parties must at times present negative views of the US and US actions.[34] Without this counter-point in the narrative presented, the selected audience will view it as simply an echo of the official US perspective. The selected audience will dismiss the content and the effort will fail to achieve the desired effect. Additionally, overt US support diminishes the entire third party effect, by compromising the independence of the speaker…"[35] In order to remain credible, third party validators must remain independent and the US must relinquish some control of the message to benefit from their influence. Bringing all of the separate efforts together however, requires a common narrative.

Currently, the US lacks a common narrative that can unify disparate efforts in opposition to violent extremist ideology. Lack of agility, crossed messages, and failure of the initial strategic narrative continues to destroy synchronicity—the essential element to gain and maintain coherence and credibility.[36] Part of the problem results from attempts to control the message. In our democratic system, politicians must build and maintain a wide base of support in order to win elections. The opinions of supporters may align generally but differ deeply on specific issues. Politicians must then navigate, carefully testing the

---

[30] Maajid Nawaz, "We Must Not Stand by as Muslims Democrats Battle the Extremists," *The Telegraph* 17 March 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8389089/We-must-not-stand-by-as-Muslim-democrats-battle-the-extremists.html (25 March 2011).

[31] Quilliam, "Why Quilliam?," http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/why-quilliam.html.

[32] Nawaz, "We Must Not Stand by as Muslims Democrats Battle the Extremists,"

[33] Collings, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 39.

[34] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 40.

[35] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 40.

[36] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 40, 41.

support their base will provide on each decision they make. When decisive action requires a specific policy prescription, politicians often make general decisions to avoid the risk of alienating part of their support base. Instead of designating simply the left and right limits around a central unifying theme to create a readily recognizable core narrative, leaders often keep their initiatives so broad that it destroys unity and sometimes leads to the adoption of an inappropriate strategic narrative.[37] In the words of Huntington, "[w]ar aims phrased in sweeping ideological terms are seldom capable of achievement. Consequently, war is normally followed by a period of disillusionment with the techniques of violence as a means for securing liberal goals."[38]

An example of the tendency to adopt broad initiatives emerges in situations where it is easy to know what we are against but not what we are for.[39] Shortly after the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York, President George W. Bush delivered an address to a Joint Session of Congress. In his address, President Bush defined the attackers in a way that would garner widespread support for countermeasures. "We have seen their kind before. They're the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions, by abandoning every value except the will to power, they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way to where it ends in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies."[40] In an attempt to rally the American public against the source of the 11 September 2001 attackers, President George W. Bush compared the violent extremist threat to Nazism and totalitarianism. Nazi ideology appeals to a nearly universal conception of evil in the collective mind of the American people. President Bush played on the comparison to elicit support for US military actions to counter terrorism.

Defining the struggle as a war elevated the actions of Al-Qaeda from criminal to legitimate opposition and unified individual violent Islamic extremist groups around the

---

[37] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 41.

[38] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State; The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge,: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 152.

[39] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 274.

[40] "Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation," *The Washington Post* 20 September 2001, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html (3 May 2011).

world under one banner. Instead of defining the objective in a negative direction, against terrorism, a positive direction, such as promoting the rule of law may have deflated the Al-Qaeda agenda while highlighting the points of convergence between US interests and moderate Muslim values. Rallying against opposition produces better results in the short-term but building in a positive direction ensures the survival of the initiative beyond the defeat of the threat. Additionally, opposition based on broad characteristics provides an adversary such as Al-Qaeda the opportunity to claim common cause with similar but disconnected groups. In this way, Al-Qaeda was able to rewrite the US strategic narrative as against all Muslims.

A profusion of diverse ideas provides the ingredients essential to maintaining the freedoms the democratic style of US government provides. Americans agree on general topics, but when it comes to specifics, differences erode our collective will to support government policies. This sometimes-beneficial tendency prevents extremists from dominating the political landscape; however, it often dulls US government responses to threats. Our violent extremist adversaries do not suffer from similar distractions and diffusion of effort because they have a unifying ideology that naturally supports a core narrative.[41]

How Should the US Use Social Media?

So then, the question is how can the US government use the power of social media to change ideas? What is the role of social media in the overall US communication effort? Information operations includes psychological operation, to influence the adversary, and public affairs to inform the friendly population and forces, but there is no sphere dedicated to influencing the neutral audience. The proliferation of communication tools precludes any hope of removing the violent extremist message. This means that the US message must respond effectively, competing with the violent extremist ideology, and winning in the marketplace of ideas.[42] A quote from Philip Seib, director of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, aptly captures the importance of countering extremist views. "To allow the voices of extremism to go unchallenged

---

[41] Collings, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 41.

[42] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 43.

would be folly and would amount to surrendering the intellectual battleground. Even if just a relatively few online forum readers are exposed to official US viewpoints, that is a step forward."[43]

Liberal democratic cultural values do not have universal appeal especially among religiously devout populations. For example, Islamists often advocate for democracy "precisely because they are the primary victims of its absence."[44] Once they achieve power, however; victims of oppressive regimes rarely extend the full democratic rights to the loyal opposition.[45] Opposing violent extremists based on religious grounds may lead to increasing a neutral population's support for terrorist activities to protect traditional cultural values.[46] Programs designed to influence a neutral population should not focus exclusively on improving their attitudes towards the US and Western values.[47] The true objective is achieving support for stability and rule of law where effective government marginalizes extreme views.[48] A stable population under an effective government that has a negative view of the US is preferable to violent extremism.

Summary

Social media, while it operates on a different model than traditional media, offers similar opportunities to engage a selected audience. The audience in social media is still smaller than traditional media but growing. The merger of technologies such as mobile telephones, the Internet, and television is bringing the medium within reach of those with modest means even in remote areas. Social media offers both a more focused means to communicate to the selected audience and interactivity to provide feedback on effects. On the negative side, influence in social media builds on person-to-person relationships

---

[43] Philip Seib, "CENTCOM's Digital Engagement Tries to Counter Extremists," *The CPD Blog* August 26, 2010,
http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/centcoms_digital_engagement_tries_to_counter_extremists/ (16 March 2011).

[44] Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 29.

[45] Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*, 29.

[46] David C. Gompert and John Gordon IV, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, Rand Counterinsurgency Study; Final Report (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp., 2008), 164; Philip Seib, "Public Diplomacy and Counterterrorism," 16 September 2010,
http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/public_diplomacy_and_counterterrorism/ (8 December 2010).

[47] Seib, "Public Diplomacy and Counterterrorism,"

[48] Gompert and Gordon IV, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, 164.

requiring large numbers of participants on both sides to generate effects. The medium is also resistant to control of the message requiring the influence of third parties to validate and lend credibility to messages. Social media does provide the opportunity to change ideas and combat violent extremism, especially if the US is willing to support the efforts of independent validators. "[T]he role of counterpropaganda efforts, wherever feasible, should be to support and amplify such Muslim initiatives rather than to generate competing Western messages. This also implies the need for counterpropaganda capabilities … to discredit AQ and inoculate at-risk population – including immigrant populations in the West – against AQ's appeal."[49] In the next chapter the discussion will focus on defining what type of tactics will work best in the social media environment.

---

[49] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 15.

Chapter 3

Social Media Communication Tactics

We are not going to win the struggle for men's minds merely by…a super loud Voice of America.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower

Traditional campaigns communicate with a selected audience through mass media. This one-to-many relationship concentrates on a particular segment of the population using branding and positioning to focus the effort according to the unique needs, wants, and behaviors of the selected audience.[1] In addition to communications with the particular segment, traditional campaigns attempt to use the media and the influence of opinion makers to amplify the intended message.[2] Branding and positioning create the overall structure of the communications campaign. Advertising often uses eye-catching graphics, rhymes, memorable jingles, and music to elicit an emotional connection to the audience.[3] Some research indicates that messages targeting the right side of the brain prove more effective.[4] Maddock and Fulton believe that the right side of the brain is the locus of artistic expression and emotion, as well as the center of long-term memory.[5] Advertising seeks to access the brain in a way that places the desired message in the long-term memory of the audience in order to influence motivations.[6] Communicators then employ tactics within the overall campaign structure to link motivation to behavior.

Both positive and negative motivations affect the behavior of the selected audience. Individuals with positive motivations respond to desires to satisfy a craving.[7] For example, the smell of corn dogs and curly fries at a county fair motivate a consumer

---

[1] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 59.

[2] Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 204.

[3] Maddock and Fulton, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 17.

[4] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 17.

[5] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 17.

[6] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 17.

[7] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 124.

to buy because they want to satisfy a craving for a food not often encountered.[8] The consumer seeks satisfaction when they are hungry and they reach equilibrium when they are sated causing the desire to subside.[9] Negative motivation responds to desires to remove a stimulus. On a hot day, an iced drink removes the stimulus of thirst.[10] Consumers seek the source of a positive stimulus and seek to remove the source of a negative stimulus.[11] Audience research must uncover the positive and negative motivations in order to use them to influence behavior.

 Uncovering motivations requires qualitative research sometimes called motivational research.[12] The most common method of conducting motivational research is the focus group.[13] Social media provides a suitable conduit for conducting this type of research. In the physical world, screening candidates for a focus group takes considerable time and money. Just finding the requisite number of participants is difficult, not to mention ensuring that the participants posses the correct mix of desired audience characteristics. Social media provides much of the necessary data so a researcher can easily find and invite perspective candidates that already have the correct characteristics. Social media facilitates the administration of prequalification online surveys to increase the accuracy of the chosen group. The group does not need to be physically present in one location, which simplifies the logistics and reduces the cost of research. Once discovered, a successful message connects the motivation to the benefits of the product offered.[14]

 Motivations have both logical and emotional components. The logical component justifies the decision to buy a product based on what a person consciously believes about a product.[15] The logical decision does not reflect the true motivation for the decision

---

[8] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 124-125.

[9] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 125.

[10] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 125.

[11] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 125.

[12] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 125.

[13] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 126-129. Maddock and Fulton outline many problems with the current practice of focus group research, however, after outlining their recommendations for improvement conclude that focus groups remain the most effective method to discover audience motivations.

[14] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 136.

[15] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 135.

because consumers are often not conscious of their underlying motivations.[16] "For example, you may believe that orange juice has Vitamin C, and that Vitamin C is good for you."[17] The benefit is not directly associated with the motivation of physical survival, which is the true reason for seeking the benefit that is "good for you".[18] The emotional components may actually provide a closer link to motivation than the logical reasons. The transfer value of these commercial marketing techniques indicate that tactics employed in strategic communications should focus on the source of motivation instead of just using a logical reasoning appeal.

The tactics used in delivering a message to the selected audience influence the level of positive response.[19] The characteristics of the influence tactic and the interpretation goals for the intended audience determine the nature of the thoughts in the mind of the individual as a message is processed.[20] Of the many influence tactics, defining and labeling an issue, creating norms of reciprocity, repetition, and social consensus have the greatest potential transfer value to social media.[21] All four tactics are likely to work well in social settings where one-to-one and many-to-many interactive relationships constitute the norm. This accurately describes the social media environment that would need to provide support for the operative characteristics for each of the four tactics.

Defining and Labeling

Defining and labeling an issue provides the communicator the opportunity to control and direct the thoughts of the selected audience to increase persuasion.[22] For example, redefining the conflict with Islamic extremists in secular terms focusing on the rule of law removes the religious component. Removing the religious association automatically decreases the controversy and potential resistance associated with deeply held personal faith convictions. Additionally, appealing to the moderate Muslim

---

[16] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 136.

[17] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 136.

[18] ———, *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*, 136.

[19] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[20] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[21] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 74. Pratkanis mentions the existence of 107 empirically tested influence tactics and 18 ways to build credibility. The four used here provide a representative sample that serves to demonstrate the applicability of selected tactics to social media.

[22] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 74.

audience by emphasizing how continued violence prevents improving government provision of essential services and economic conditions is likely more effective. Using a common appeal provides US communicators with credibility that they lack in a religious-based argument asserting that the Koran forbids violence. Efforts to increase influence by changing the label also provides opportunities to create norms of reciprocity based on the expectation of continued interaction.[23]

Norms of Reciprocity

The strength of social media influence resides in the ability to create relationships with individuals and groups.[24] Creating relationships provides opportunities for norms of reciprocity to establish the basis for constructive dialogue. These norms are as simple as allowing the expression of contrary views and opinions without condemnation. This creates a spirit of respectful exchange of views. Knowledge of the opposing view creates understanding and may lead to respectful debate. Even if the interlocutors do not agree, they still build a mutual respect through the exchange of ideas establishing norms of reciprocity in the process.[25] The repetition of messages also helps increase the relative share of the concept in the marketplace of ideas.

Repetition

When one view dominates, the established opinion quickly overwhelms a new idea that is contrary to the prevalent thought. Once a norm of reciprocity establishes a foothold for the minority view it gains market share through repetition. Pratkanis, argues that "[r]epeating the same information increases the tendency [for the audience] to believe and to like that information."[26] Simply repeating the same view is unlikely to change an audience opinion; however, the relative share of the view in the marketplace of

---

[23] Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1984), 29; Robert M. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, Rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 5. Cialdini discusses the obligation that individuals feel to reciprocate when given an unsolicited gift and Axelrod talks about the established custom in the US congress that establish norms of reciprocity.

[24] Lt. Cmdr William Speaks (Digital Engagement Team Commander, United States Central Command, MacDill AFB, FL) phone interview by the author, 27 January 2011.

[25] Lt. Cmdr William Speaks (Digital Engagement Team Commander, United States Central Command, MacDill AFB, FL) phone interview by the author, 27 January 2011. Digital Engagement Team analysts often note a change from simple rejection and invective towards their posts to reasoned counter points and evidence of research attempting to refute the US perspective.

[26] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 74.

ideas creates a cluster of information for the audience to think about.[27] Lewis indicates that the dominant framework of information available to individuals influences their opinions.[28] In the case of mass media, Lewis discovers that the material presented creates an informational climate that makes some opinions seem more plausible than others.[29]

Social Consensus

The concept of creating a dominant framework appears also to operate with social consensus. Individuals observe the behavior of others around them and conclude that "[i]f others agree, it must be the right thing to do."[30] In a social media context, audiences will likely adopt the dominant conceptual frame. Where violent extremist views dominate, these views are likely to become the accepted norm. Challenging violent extremist views provides the audience with an alternate frame to consider. Breaking into this type of environment may require third party validation of messages. A traditional media campaign often uses famous personalities or media opinion makers to amplify their message. Traditional media personalities do not transfer well to social media, but the validation mechanism does. Independent social media influencers in a commercial sense gain credibility through accurate and balanced evaluation of products and services. The audience uses the accuracy of influencers past opinions and their perceived independence from the message source to evaluate their current credibility. Social media audiences respond to the validation of messages by individuals based on their perceived independence from the source and level of credibility. These same mechanisms likely operate in social media to change political values, attitudes, and beliefs. Where one view is dominant, presenting a mildly different view may prove of greater utility than presenting a stark contrast. A view that only departs slightly from the dominant frame will receive more consideration and less condemnation than an opposite view.[31] Slowly

---

[27] Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 100.

[28] ———, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 102.

[29] ———, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*, 116.

[30] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 74. Pratkanis uses the example of "Mao's propaganda posters [that] often showed many people engaged in a state-approved behavior."

[31] Karlins and Abelson, *Persuasion; How Opinions and Attitudes Are Changed*, 22, 25, 26. Presenting both sides of an argument proves most effective when approaching an audience that initially disagrees.

moving the cognitive frame to the desired view exerts influence while avoiding the immediate resistance of a rapid shift.

Achieving persuasion in part depends on influencing the cogitative response of the selected audience to create thoughts "agreeable to the communicator's point of view."[32] Pratkanis summarizes the work of other authors in describing three routes in the social-psychological reception of information: peripheral, central, and rationalizing. If the goal of the recipient is to hold a correct opinion about the message then they will likely choose the peripheral or central route.[33] The peripheral route to persuasion relies on the attractiveness and confidence of the communicator as well as the level of agreement that already exists between the communicator and the audience.[34] The message recipient does not devote much effort to understanding the content of the message in the peripheral route.[35] A central route indicates that the recipient "engages in careful and thoughtful consideration of true merits of the information presented."[36] The rationalizing route occurs when the recipient's goal is to protect and enhance their self-image instead of achieving a correct understanding of the message.[37] The rationalizing recipient changes their opinion to reduce the discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance.[38] The personal relevance influences the route the recipient chooses to take in considering the message.[39] The greater the relevance of the message to the recipient the greater the change the recipient will use the central route.[40] Of the three approaches, the central route is the most suitable for the social media environment.

---

[32] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[33] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[34] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[35] Richard E. Petty, John T. Cacioppo, and David Schumann, "Cnetral and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement," *Journal of Consumer Research* 10, no. 2 (1983): 135; Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[36] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[37] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 77.

[38] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 77.

[39] Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann, "Cnetral and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement," 143; Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 77.

[40] Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann, "Cnetral and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement," 143.

Making the message personally relevant increases the chances the recipient will use the central route and decreases the need for source credibility.[41] Social media allows the agent delivering the message to tailor it to the recipient(s), making the message more personally relevant than a mass media message. In this situation, even if the selected audience believes the agent delivering the message is not credible they are more likely to give the message careful and thoughtful consideration. "Persuasion [in the central route] is determined by how well the message stands up to this scrutiny."[42] When using the peripheral route "persuasion is determined by simple cues such as the attractiveness of the communicator, whether or not others agree with the position the communicator is conveying, and the communicator's confidence."[43]

In some cases, using what Robert Cialdini calls "weapons of automatic influence" may also prove effective.[44] One such weapon of automatic influence is called the contrast principle. To demonstrate the contrast principle to students professors sometimes use three buckets of water.[45] One hot, one cold, and one room temperature. "After placing one hand in the cold water and one in the hot water, the student is told to place both in the lukewarm water simultaneously."[46] The student registers two conflicting sensations. The hand placed in the cold water senses hot water and the hand placed in hot water senses cold water.[47] "The point is that the same thing…can be made to seem very different depending on the nature of the event that precedes it."[48] One of the most effective weapons of automatic influence is reciprocity. The average person that receives an unsolicited gift feels obliged to reciprocate.[49] Reciprocity appears to be a nearly universal human trait that transcends culture and ethnicity. In noting the universality of reciprocity, Cialdini quotes archeologist Richard Leakey: "We are human

---

[41] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76. The peripheral route to influence relies on the attributes of the messenger including what others think about the messenger. The central route increases the relevance of the message to the selected individual reducing the emphasis on the messenger's credibility.

[42] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[43] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 76.

[44] Cialdini, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 23.

[45] ———, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 24.

[46] ———, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 25.

[47] ———, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 25.

[48] ———, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 25.

[49] ———, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 29.

because our ancestors learned to share their food and skills in an honored network of obligation,"[50] The danger in these techniques, however, is in the risk of discovery by the selected audience. Even if the result is not harmful, these techniques imply a connivance that would likely prove distasteful to the audience if discovered.[51] The subsequent damage to the reputation of the communicator would likely destroy the possibility of further interaction. To minimize the possible negative impacts, communicators using the weapons of automatic influence should remain transparent in their intent. The mechanisms that make these techniques effective are so ingrained in human nature that they will likely work even if the intent is fully disclosed. The mechanisms that Cialdini describes rely on universal human characteristics to create influence indicating that they will likely work in any medium.

The unique characteristics of social media reinforce some traditional media techniques. For example, the success of branding and positioning relies on knowledge of the specific needs, wants, and behaviors of the selected audience. The searchable historical record left by social media provides the data needed to determine the audience characteristics. The ability to interact with the audience reinforces the available data by filling in gaps as well as facilitating testing before launching new campaigns. Social media provides a conduit for links to other forms of media to reinforce the messages delivered. The lower cost of production in social media allows the delivery of messages using multiple tactics to different audiences simultaneously with a decreased possibility of bleed over effects. In fact, social media offers the theoretical possibility of sending messages tailored to specific individuals.

Summary

In summary, social media appears to operate at greater efficiency with many of the same characteristics as traditional media. Exploring which traditional media tactics transfer best to social media led to a focus on common characteristics. However, the tactics that work best with social media are those that take advantage of the unique characteristics of the medium. Social media is suited to establishing relationships between the messenger and the audience. Relationships created with social media allow

---

[50] ———, *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*, 30.

[51] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 66, 80. Influence relies on trust and credibility of the selected audience that the discovery of deception, trickery, or connivance destroys.

the messengers to define and label issues to create the greatest impact on the selected audience. Using the direct approach decreases the need for messenger credibility in establishing the initial contact. The expectation of continued interaction allows norms of reciprocity to take over in further establishing the credibility of the messenger. Through repetition, the messenger challenges the dominant conceptual framework and captures a share of the marketplace of ideas. Finally, the messenger provides an alternate frame for the audience to evaluate their views creating a new social consensus. Traditional media techniques using third party independent validations and emotional appeals reinforce tactics applicable to social media. Social media provides a conduit for the application of adapted traditional media techniques and those that take advantage of unique characteristics. Ultimately, overall priorities dictate where resources will provide the most return for the investment.

Efficient use of resources requires prioritization and planning in order to determine the appropriate focus for US strategic communication efforts. If the US government decides to direct strategic communications resources to social media then communicators should determine an appropriate focus to maximize efficiency. Message receptivity varies across the social media audience; therefore, resources focused on the most receptive audience segments will likely provide the best results. In addition, communicators should use the tactics appropriate for the selected audience. The next chapter concentrates on determining the most appropriate audience for the application of communications tactics to achieve the best results for the resources invested in social media.

Chapter 4

Social Media Strategic Communication Audiences

If a man does not know to what port he is steering, no wind is favorable.

Seneca

The overall social media audience is growing rapidly, but as the quote above implies, this growth alone does not make the medium effective in furthering US strategic communication goals. The analysis in this chapter focuses on how to determine the correct audience for social media communications efforts. Commercial marketers use the concepts of segmentation and branding to determine the appropriate audience for their products. These techniques apply to government communications through social media as well. Social science insights also help communicators refine approaches based on the cognitive state of individuals in the audience. Additional factors such as an individual's costs and benefits balance, audience social pressures, and the competition for audience attention also require consideration in audience selection. Narrowing the audience increases efficiency by making the best use of limited resources. The characteristics of the audience segment and the desired objective then help determine the communications approach.

What Audience does the Adversary Select?

The adversary propaganda focus is likely to provide a fist cut for social media audience selection. Al Qaeda, for example, draws support mainly from the worldwide Muslim population. However, of the estimated 1.2 billion Sunni Muslims worldwide, only some are susceptible to the violent extremist ideology. [1] A broad focus would dilute the effects of resources used to communicate with Muslims because only some are susceptible to violent extremist ideology. In addition, the selected audience must have access to the Internet and participate in social media. Al Qaeda has the luxury of using a broad focus because they enjoy the credibility of membership. The individuals in the audience that Al Qaeda selects want to be part of the larger group that their common faith creates. Individual audience members may disagree with some of the views that Al Qaeda presents, but common group membership provides the views presented by Al

---

[1] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 12.

Qaeda with greater credibility than views expressed by non-members.[2] Breaking into the group requires focusing on specific areas of agreement, first to gain credibility, and then to expand into other areas of discussion. In summary, violent extremist social media communications benefit from common group membership allowing them to achieve results with a broad audience focus. In contrast, the US must use limited social media resources to adopt a narrow focus. Once credibility is established then the effort may expand to a wider audience.

What Audience does the Medium Reach?

Most of those susceptible to violent extremist ideology live in the developing world where, according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), only about twenty-one percent of the population has access to the Internet.[3] These figures most likely reflect the number of Internet connections per capita and do not account for the profusion of Internet cafes that serve multiple individuals per connection. Even with this mitigating factor, many individuals in the developing world do not have Internet access, which may limit the potential direct influence of social media.[4] Social media tends to transfer content easily between individuals but rarely transfers to a larger audience without a link to a physical event. Usually traditional media content generates conversations in social media; however, transfer from social media to other media is becoming more common.[5] Individuals that use social media transfer the content through contact with their family and associates working in other media. Print, radio, and television journalists use social media content as seeds for their work, broadcasting the message from social media to a wider audience.[6] Transfer of content expands the reach of social media just as technology is expanding the reach of the Internet in the developing world.

---

[2] Karlins and Abelson, *Persuasion; How Opinions and Attitudes Are Changed*, 49. "A person's opinions and attitudes are strongly influenced by the groups to which he belongs and wants to belong."

[3] International Telecommunications Union, "The World in 2010: ICT Facts and Figures," 2010, http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/FactsFigures2010.pdf (7 March 2011).

[4] Social media influences indirectly as well as directly. Individuals with access to social media transmit ideas to other individuals that they have contact with.

[5] Altman, "Central Command Uses Social Media to Respond to 'Enemy Propaganda'," ; Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 9. Altman writes about a traditional media story that sparked a social media conversation and Shirky writes about a social media effort that transferred to traditional media.

[6] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 19.

The proliferation of mobile cellular technology in the developing world provides connectivity in many areas where Internet access is not available. The ITU estimated that in 2010 mobile telephone technology provided access to 68% of the population in the developing world.[7] Mobile cellular technologies cannot deliver the same level of content as full Internet access, however, even this limited conduit permits contact directly to individuals in the audience. The decreasing cost of mobile telephone technology and the growth of network infrastructure will soon bring the same level of mobile connectivity available currently in developed nations to remote areas. Furthermore, while the growth rate of Internet and mobile subscriptions decreased worldwide, it is growing at high rates in the developing world.[8] This trend indicates that the audience available for social media is also growing.

The role of social media in a particular society determines the potential of the medium to spread influence. Major James Kinniburgh and Dr. Dorothy Denning proposed a list of questions designed to determine the suitability of a particular information environment for creating influence with blogging. With simple modifications, the same questions prove useful in determining if the role of social media in the information environment is suitable for creating influence. The questions in Table 1, use both quantitative and qualitative metrics as indicators of quality and credibility of social media in the selected information environment.[9] These same questions are also applicable to determining the suitability of using existing social media sites for US strategic communications efforts.

- What is the size of the audience?
- What is the role of the audience members in their community and nation?
- What is the target audience for the site?
- Does the site address social and political issues relevant to the audience?
- What is the prevalent bias? Is the bias reinforced or challenged?
- Do members engage in open debate and does the audience participate?

Table 1: Social Media Environment Analysis Questions

---

[7] International Telecommunications Union, "The World in 2010: ICT Facts and Figures,"
[8] ———, "The World in 2010: ICT Facts and Figures,"
[9] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 23.

Source: Adapted from James Kinniburgh and Dorothy Elizabeth Robling Denning. *Blogs and Military Information Strategy*.

The final two pieces in refining the audience relate to social media use and susceptibility to violent extremist ideology. In *Talking to the Enemy,* Scott Atran catalogues the general characteristics of violent extremists as early twenties, non-religious, science oriented, middle class, and married. [10] Individuals with these characteristics are likely to have Internet access and use social media. Therefore, while not all audiences are available on social media, those individuals most susceptible to violent extremist influences are. Segmentation of this audience will provide even greater focus to optimize the use of limited resources.

Refining the Audience from a Macro View

Commercial advertising uses segmentation to select the individuals who are most closely identified with the product and most likely to buy the product.[11] Employing the concept of audience segmentation, as used in commercial advertising, may assist in determining the appropriate audience for government strategic communications using social media. Advertisers employ a three-part process to develop market segments.[12] First, market researchers analyze the entire audience to determine the unique wants, needs, and desires of each segment.[13] Market research, such as focus groups and surveys, provides data to divide the audience into segments with common characteristics.[14] Second, companies evaluate the segments to determine which groups are most likely to purchase the product, to include assessing if the size of the potential market makes the marketing worth the cost, as well as if the audience is reachable and through which mediums.[15] Third, companies decide to market a product to a specific segment or

---

[10] Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Ecco Press), 36.

[11] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 59.

[12] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 60.

[13] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 60.

[14] Alan R. Andreasen, *Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 174-176.

[15] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 60.

produce multiple products and market to multiple segments.[16] Finally, the research

provides information on the influential individuals in the segment.[17] The opinions of a

selected audience tend to align with those of respected individuals.[18] Therefore,

influencing one may change the opinions of many and is at least a key indicator of

change in the opinions of the majority.[19] Targeting many segments with one product

makes satisfying all needs difficult. Alternately, companies may develop a variety of

products designed to satisfy the needs of multiple segments.[20]

Employing social media can reduce cost, risk, and the amount of time necessary

to determine the appropriate audience segments. Focus groups and surveys conducted

using social media reduces the time necessary to find and contact participants. The

participants do not need to be physically collocated to conduct an online focus group,

thereby eliminating the cost of renting a physical location. In an area where security is

lacking, conducting research remotely reduces the risk to researchers. Reading the

historical record of social media audience interaction may provide all of the data required

to determine an appropriate audience.[21] Large audience segments sometimes require

multiple tailored messages that appeal to subgroups in order to maintain interest over the

entire range of individual preferences.

Selecting Multiple Audiences

In a commercial marketing environment, some companies develop a number of

products, each providing a slightly different optimization of desired attributes. This

family of products attempts to capitalize on the company's brand. The brand represents

---

[16] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 60.

[17] Andreasen, *Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment*, 254; Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 60.

[18] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 104.

[19] Andreasen, *Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment*, 255; Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 104.

[20] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 60.

[21] Lt. Cmdr William Speaks (Digital Engagement Team Commander, United States Central Command, MacDill AFB, FL) phone interview by the author, 27 January 2011. Before engaging in a social media environment, the Digital Engagement Team (DET) analysts review previous conversations to determine if the discussion will provide an effective conduit for US influence.

the perceptions that consumers form based on all their experience with the product and interactions with the company.[22] Individual members of an audience segment may identify with the general attributes of a brand, but a specific product may not meet their exact needs. Instead of one product designed to the middle of the segment, developing multiple products, each associated with the general attributes of the brand and incorporating specific needs of sub-segment groups, generates better overall sales.[23] Companies attempt to position their brands and products to achieve the greatest market share.[24] Positioning statements articulate the unique advantages of the product; what the consumer will achieve with the product and the reason that the consumer should believe the product will provide the benefits.[25] "A good way to clarify the nature of the … 'product' is to [represent] the US mission as a 'brand' that will bring certain benefits to the target audience if the audience chooses to buy it."[26] Capturing the unique wants, needs, and desires of the entire audience presents an impossible problem. However modifying the message to incorporate the majority is possible. Social media provides a conduit for disseminating broad themes to the entire audience as well as tailored messages to specific individuals. Audience segmentation and branding help the communicator reach the widest possible audience while maximizing the return for the resources expended.

Selecting the Audience from a Micro View

Using the techniques above, communicators analyze the audience from a macro perspective by breaking it into parts. There are also techniques that look at the cognitive stage of individuals to provide additional insights that help construct segments from the micro perspective. The process of influence that moves an individual from one type of

---

[22] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 65.

[23] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 59.

[24] Anthony R. Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, Rev. ed. (New York: W.H. Freeman, 2001), 198; Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 67.

[25] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 65.

[26] Stony Trent and James Doty III, "Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations," *Military Review* 85, no. 4 (2005): 71.

behavior to another occurs in various stages over time.[27] Tailoring messages to the stage of the individual audience member increases the effectiveness of the influence effort.[28] Alan Andreasen uses precontemplation, contemplation, preparation and action, and maintenance to describe the stages of influencing behavioral change.[29] Characterizing audience members by cognitive stage allows communicators to build audience segments one individual at a time.

Using Andreasen's stages, the audience susceptible to violent extremist ideology might be categorized in the following way. Individuals in the action stage are already engaging in violent extremist behavior.[30] Influencing them might be possible but would require enormous efforts to generate meager results. On the other extreme, individuals in precontemplation are not even considering violent extremist ideology and do not understand why some individuals might engage in such behavior.[31] While individuals in precontemplation may move towards contemplation, they are not an immediate concern. Influencing individuals in contemplation and maintenance provide the best opportunities for results.[32] In the contemplation stage, individuals know "where [they] want to go but [are] not quite ready yet."[33] Contemplators continue to evaluate the perceived cost and benefits associated with a particular action.[34] Individuals in the maintenance stage remain committed to refraining from violent extremist behavior. Individuals in maintenance moved either from contemplation directly, or might have already tried the

---

[27] Alan R. Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2006), 100.

[28] Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 100.

[29] ———, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 100, 101; James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente, "Stages and Processes of Self-Change of Smoking: Toward An Integrative Model of Change," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 51, no. 3 (1983): 391. Andreasen excludes relapse and combines preparation and action stages of the Transtheoretical Model of Change developed by Prochaska and DiClemente.

[30] Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 101; James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente, "In Search of How People Change Applications to Addictive Behaviors," *American Psychologist* 47, no. 9 (September 1992): 1104. Prochaska and DiClemente define the stages of change as moving toward the positive behavior and Andreasen provides definitions that can move in both directions such as when the goal is encouraging individuals already predisposed to action to remain inactive.

[31] Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 102.

[32] Seib, "Public Diplomacy and Counterterrorism,"

[33] Prochaska and DiClemente, "In Search of How People Change Applications to Addictive Behaviors," 1103.

[34] ———, "In Search of How People Change Applications to Addictive Behaviors," 1103.

behavior but returned to maintenance.[35] Those individuals in maintenance that have already tried the behavior represent an important segment because they have greater credibility with and ability to move contemplators to maintenance. Individuals in contemplation are thinking about violent extremist behavior. Contemplators may be intrigued, "vaguely contemplating the undesired behavior;… potential switchers, individuals that find the alternative attractive;…[or]…defectors, individuals who once engaged in the undesirable behavior and gave it up but are tempted to take it up again."[36] A focus on the audience susceptible to, but not yet involved in, violent extremist activity increases the importance of influencing individuals in the contemplation phase.

Keeping individuals in precontemplation and maintenance is less important than moving individuals already in contemplation toward maintenance. The objective is to keep individuals in the maintenance state and prevent contemplators from moving to preparation and action.[37] In the contemplation state, the most important consideration for the individual is the balance of costs and benefits.[38] The most important task for the influencer is to reduce the costs as much as possible for the individual to move in the desired direction.[39] In addition, constructing a compelling package of benefits may help the individual overcome the important costs and move in the desired direction.[40] Using Andreasen's stages to create audience segments assumes that individuals seek rational value maximization. Some behaviors, however, result from motivations outside a rational cost benefit calculation.

Additional Audience Selection Considerations

Social interactions and self-assurance also influence behavior. Peer pressure, small group norms, or just observing the behavior of others in some situations motivates behavior that a cost benefit analysis does not explain.[41] Additionally, some individuals resist both cost benefit balance, and social pressure because they do not believe they are

---

[35] Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 102.

[36] ———, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 102.

[37] ———, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 102.

[38] ———, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 103.

[39] ———, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 103; Prochaska and DiClemente, "In Search of How People Change Applications to Addictive Behaviors," 1109. Prochaska and DiClemente write about the importance of emotional costs and benefits in addition to material costs in motivating behavioral change.

[40] Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 103.

[41] ———, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 103.

capable of a particular behavior.[42] In their research of addictive behavior change, Prochaska and DiClemente find that intervention tailored to the individual's readiness for change produces better results.[43] Influencers must keep these mechanisms in mind because they are neutral mechanisms. Just like terrain and weather, they can work for or against the intended influence.[44]

In additional to social and individual mechanisms, competition for influence may result from the environment or the enemy. Behaviors linked to self-identity are the most difficult to change because the individual must redefine their self-image for change to occur.[45] For behaviors linked to a religious or cultural identity, the social environment works against the desire to change. Some individuals may prefer the status quo while others may respond to the efforts of competitors. Where the competition uses well-established forums, attracting users to new sites will likely prove difficult. Only a small number of Internet sites experience high popularity as measured by the number of unique links.[46] Sites with larger audiences gain a larger share of any new users added to the overall audience.[47] Therefore, posting on established sites will likely provide the best opportunities for influence.[48] Social interaction and individual self-assurance as well as adversary sources of competition require consideration in selecting the audience and determining where resources will produce the greatest effect.

Summary

In selecting the appropriate audience for social media communications efforts, the adversary facing us today has exposed an initial focus. Both the violent extremists and the US compete to influence the susceptible, but uncommitted individuals in the larger

---

[42] Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997), 20-23. Bandura describes human behavior is a function of an individual's belief in their ability or self-efficacy and the rewards or sanctions that the environment offers. Individuals with low self-efficacy will stop trying even if in a supportive environment. An individual with high self-efficacy will keep trying and even change the environment if necessary.

[43] Prochaska and DiClemente, "In Search of How People Change Applications to Addictive Behaviors," 1110.

[44] Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, 103.

[45] Prochaska and DiClemente, "In Search of How People Change Applications to Addictive Behaviors," 1109.

[46] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 5.

[47] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 5.

[48] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 6. On the positive side, posting on a small number of sites provides access to large audiences and the majority of sites do not require attention because they represent an insignificant percentage of the total audience.

audience. Individuals already committed to violent extremist activity will likely reject any influence attempts. On the other side, individuals unlikely to engage in violent extremist activity do not require influence. Those in the middle remain; however, scarce resources require further focus to create effective influence. Audience research provides the information necessary to create audience segments, while branding allows tailoring of multiple influence products under an overall theme. Dividing the audience further based on their cognitive stage improves the effect of the influence message. Finally, incorporating considerations of the cost benefit balance, social influences, and the competition complete the campaign focus.

Observed results often vary from the predicted model even with an influence campaign based on complete audience information. Opinions and attitudes remain a moving target requiring periodic assessment to recognize and incorporate the change. Chapter 5 focuses on how to assess the effects of social media messages on the selected audience and incorporating feedback into the campaign process in order to improve results.
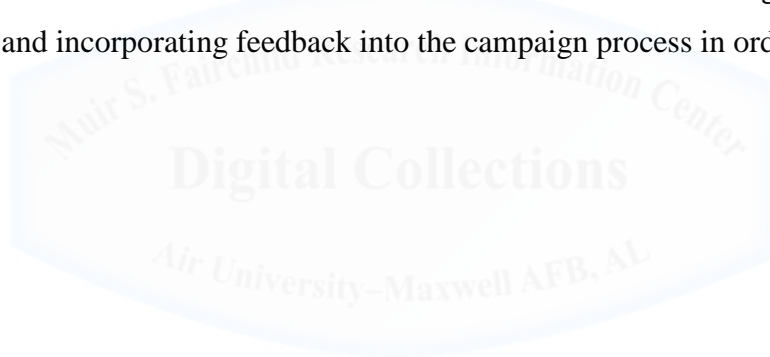
Chapter 5

Assessing the Effects of Strategic Communications in Social Media

"The starting point for thinking about and developing metrics for national power is to view states as 'capabilities containers'."

<div align="right">Treverton and Jones</div>

"In war, Truth is the first casualty"

<div align="right">Aeschylus, 525 B.C. – 456 B.C.</div>

Some social media advocates point to declining newspaper subscriptions and television viewer numbers as an indication of the eventual demise of traditional media and inevitable dominance of social media.[1] However, increases in the social media audience do not necessarily directly result in a decrease of traditional media audiences. The social media audience is growing, but is not likely to replace traditional sources of influence in the near future.[2] Recognizing the fact that social media has influence and incorporating the medium into the overall US strategic communications campaign is more important that debating which type of media has more influence. Chapter four explored how to determine the appropriate audience for strategic communications efforts in social media. The current chapter focuses on how to measure the impact of messages on the selected social media audience. Sufficient evidence exists to supports claims that social media changes opinions and mobilize audiences. Authoritarian regimes around the world are implementing controls on information technologies because they recognize the threat that social media pose to the power of the ruling elite.[3] In a pragmatic move, some regimes also recruit bloggers in order to incorporate the power of social media into their information strategy.[4] However, the source of social media power and the mechanisms that influence individual audience members remains uncertain.

Governments lack a full understanding of social media influence mechanisms, which translates into a poor use of the power of social media in support of national objectives. Social media and the technology that supports the medium has changed the

---

[1] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 11.

[2] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 12.

[3] James Miles, "Can Govermetns Control the Internet?," *BBC News* 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/623339.stm (15 MAY 2011); Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 2.

[4] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 2.

dynamics of influence by increasing speed and reach, adding interactivity, and allowing the audience to create as well as consume content.[5] Still, social media does not operate in isolation and in many respects relies on traditional media to provide seed material or broadcast to wider audiences.[6] The complexity of interaction between traditional media and social media as well as the lack of historical experience complicates efforts to measure social media influence.

Establish a Baseline Measurement

Measuring the effects of messages intended to influence an audience requires "identifying some measurable quantity or quality that is not confounded by other possible causes."[7] An initial collection of data produces a record of the current information environment or baseline for later comparison. A baseline describes the current attitudes and opinions in the information space.[8] Later data collection, when compared to the initial quantitative or qualitative data provides a measure of change. Measuring views and opinions over time provides feedback to guide communication with the audience.[9] Traditional media uses polling, surveys, and interviews to gather information from the selected audience in order to gage message effects.[10] These methods in addition to their high cost expose the individuals gathering information to risk where security is poor.[11] Lack of security also increases the negative effects of various forms of bias inherent in traditional media measurement techniques.[12] Focus groups help mitigate some of the bias

---

[5] Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, 232. Hanson argues that state power remains the same but the costs to control the flow of information have changed. Additionally, technology enables non-state actors to participate in international politics with greater force.

[6] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 5. Kinniburgh and Denning separate blogs from social media, however, the distinction is minimal. Blogs serve a social purpose just as often as they serve to disseminate information and opinions.

[7] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 47.

[8] Allen, *Information Operations Planning*, 113. Allen describes the conceptual area as the idea battlespace, however, information space provides a broader view that includes civilian instead of just military perspectives.

[9] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 45.

[10] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 47.

[11] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 102.

[12] ———, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 48; Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge studies in comparative politics (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Helmus lists the various forms of bias

but are also expensive, expose the facilitators and audiences to risk, and are difficult to conduct quickly enough to benefit ongoing influence operations.[13] Using social media reduces the cost and minimizes the risks of conducting polling, surveys, and interviews, but still suffers from bias. Incorporating focus groups into traditional measurements gathered using social media provides significant advantages. Social media focus groups cost less, do not expose the facilitator to risks, and provide timely feedback because they do not require a physical location to form a group. Although it may offer advantages in some cases, social media is still subject to the limitations of the audience available through the medium. Social media does not reach everyone and therefore measurements that reflect the selected audience may not accurately reflect the entire population. This does not reduce the utility of social media in the overall strategic communications campaign, especially where the audience selected for influence coincides with the social media audience.

Access to the Audience

Determining the effects of influence operations requires access to the selected audience, a baseline measure for comparison, and measurements over time to determine if audience opinions are moving in the desired direction. Social media facilitates access to the selected audience by reducing the cost and risk. Measures of performance (MOP), generally quantitative in nature, measure the actions taken to produce and disseminate messages.[14] These measurements reflect the type and quantity of work performed to send messages to the selected audience. MOPs answer the question, "Are we doing things right," but do not answer, "Are we doing the right things?" Measures of effectiveness (MOE), sometimes quantitative, but generally qualitative in nature, provide information about the effects of influence operations on the selected audience.[15] These measurements normally focus on attributes of the enemy or neutral groups. MOE often prove difficult

---

that can skew polls and Kalyvas provides examples of how violence can control a population. The prevalence of violence will likely exacerbate polling bias because respondents are concerned more about how their answers may affect their security than about giving honest answers.

[13] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 103. Traditional focus groups require selecting individual audience members with the desired characteristics, contacting them to request participation, scheduling the date and time in advance and arranging for a physical location to meet. Adversaries could choose to disrupt the focus group or influence the participants to skew the results.

[14] Allen, *Information Operations Planning*, 128.

[15] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 128.

to record directly and their subjective nature leaves room for interpretation.[16] However, establishing a baseline and monitoring trends over time provides the communicator with feedback of sufficient fidelity to guide the improvement of influence operations.[17] No metric is perfect, especially amid the complexity of multiple messages competition for attention.

Competition for Attention

Interactions occur between messages and audiences, between different audiences, and between the messages.[18] Each of the entities competes for the attention of the selected audience in the information space.[19] In general, the greater the level of attention a message receives the greater the potential influence on the audience.[20] Physical events linked to the message play a pivotal role in gaining the attention of the audience.[21] Influence requires gaining and maintaining attention over time. "Information overload and "noise" are serious problems that contribute to the masking of messages."[22] Audiences begin to ignore messages that do not change, and messages that are not linked to physical events may never attract attention.[23] The level of attention the selected audience lends to the message also provides a measure of the effect.

The Importance of Feedback

Success in influencing an audience requires a long series of events to unfold in a favorable manner. Unlike kinetic operations where effects result directly from the cause,

---

[16] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 128.

[17] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 129.

[18] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 113. Allen uses group in place of audience. Audience is used here to remain consistent.

[19] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 114.

[20] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 110.

[21] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 120; Jonah Peretti, "My Nike Media Adventure," *Nation* 272, no. 14 (2001): 20; Travers D. Scott, "Tempests of the Blogosphere: Presidential Campaign Stories that Failed to Ignite Mainstream Media," (University of Washington, 2005), 10. Peretti writes about the need for messages to reach critical mass before they transfer between layers, from micro (face to face, e-mail, telephones, personal websites and blogs), to middle media (community blogs and aggregation sites, and content rating sites), to mass media. Bennett, cited in Scott, points out how power struggles and conflict help micromedia events transfer to mass media. In a slide show presentation, Professor Bennett linked the idea of indexing, or transfer aided by conflict or a power struggle, to Jonah Peretti's description of media layers. Professor Bennett has not published the proprietarily material in the slide show referenced by Scott, so his student's thesis (Scott) is the only available source of these ideas.

[22] Kramer and Wentz, "Cyber Influence and International Security," 346.

[23] Allen, *Information Operations Planning*, 120.

influence results from indirect effects.[24] Operations intended to influence a selected audience "tend to have a longer sequence of links from direct actions to the desired effect."[25] The long chains of cause-and-effect required to achieve influence increase the need for feedback. Feedback helps the communicator "determine whether each step has actually been accomplished, or if additional effort is required to achieve that step and therefore complete the chain."[26] "The probability of success with feedback is always greater than or equal to the probability of success without feedback."[27]

Quantitative Measures of Influence

Research focused on blogs, a subset of social media, suggests using measurements of the medium to infer influence instead of trying to measure the change in the audience directly. Using this type of measurement may offer an advantage when access to the population is limited. The three-layer model of the information environment created by Jonah Peretti provides the basis for using characteristics of the medium as a measurement for influence. In Peretti's model, traditional media occupies the conventional layer, the middle layer consists of well-known blogs, news aggregators, and advocacy groups, and the micro layer consists of personal blogs, mailing lists, and email.[28] Bennett argues that communication success requires transfer, meaning that the message achieves visibility and mobilizes audiences in all three layers of the information environment.[29] Recording the number of visitors to a specific site provides one quantitative measure of interest and potential for transfer to other layers.[30] Counting the number of links to a site may indicate both the popularity and credibility of the content.[31] Internet users following links are "more likely to encounter a well-connected [site], or

---

[24] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 43.

[25] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 43.

[26] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 45.

[27] ———, *Information Operations Planning*, 45.

[28] Peretti, "My Nike Media Adventure," 20.

[29] Scott, "Tempests of the Blogosphere: Presidential Campaign Stories that Failed to Ignite Mainstream Media," 10. In a slide show presentation, Professor Bennett linked the idea of indexing, or transfer aided by conflict or a power struggle, to Jonah Peretti's description of media layers. Professor Bennett has not published the proprietarily material in the slide show referenced by Scott, so his student's thesis (Scott) is the only available source of these ideas.

[30] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 14.

[31] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 14.

information posted on it, than one that is not."[32] The number of site visits and the

number of links provide quantities that may indicate relative popularity but prove

problematic in determining influence.[33] In general, the greater the level of attention on a

message the greater the potential influence.[34] Sometimes, however, interest does not

equate to influence but simply to curiosity or affinity for the format but not the views

expressed.[35] Furthermore, these measures are divorced from the individuals themes and

messages communicated because they measure the overall site and not the influence of

specific site content.[36] Commercial efforts to boost site rankings in search engines

sometimes create numerous blogs laden with links and references to sites they are

promoting.[37] Quantitative measures based on links and references become skewed by

this type of activity. Bundling quantitative measures together and using tools that track

the spread of social media conversations or produce visual representation of links

between sites may help mitigate some of the potential shortfalls in isolated quantitative

statistics.[38] Quantitative measurements report precisely on one dimension of a site, which

does not represent an accurate assessment of influence without additional data.

Qualitative Measures of Influence

Measurements of quantities are often misleading; however, when combined with

qualitative measures they provide feedback essential to influence operations. Qualitative

measures of the medium indicate potential influence because they determine how well a

site can attract and maintain audience attention.[39] The level of influence depends on the

size of the audience as well as audience perception of the site's credibility and quality.[40]

Some of the factors that may influence the audiences' perception of a site include the

design of the site based on selected audience preference, the relevance of the content to

---

[32] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 10.
[33] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 13.
[34] Allen, *Information Operations Planning*, 114.
[35] Derk Kinnane, "Winning Over the Muslim Mind," *The National Interest*, no. 75 (Spring 2004): 94.
[36] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 16.
[37] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 8.
[38] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 25.
[39] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 9, 17. Kinniburgh and Denning reach conclusions for blogs that transfer to any social media site. Blogs focus on one individual's work; however, the characteristics of credibility, design, utility, accuracy, and currency affect the ability of websites to gain and maintain attention.
[40] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 17.

the selected audience, the credibility in terms of accuracy and consistency, and the frequency of updates.[41]

The work of Kinniburgh and Denning with respect to blogs proves useful in the assessment of social media. With some minor changes, the questions in Table 2 adapted from "Blogs and Military Information Strategy" provide some useful metrics for constructing indicators of social media influence.[42] Monitoring the change in the quantitative and qualitative measures that result from these questions may provide direction for an influence campaign. Efforts to influence opinions take time to register in significant changes of quantitative and qualitative metrics that provide feedback for periodic reviews of strategic communications campaigns. Kinniburgh and Denning's recommendation of quarterly reviews for blog based influence operations provide a good starting point for application to social media influence.[43] The speed of the information environment will determine the appropriate frequency to review influence campaign metrics.

Table 2 Social Media Influence Analysis Questions

- What is the change in the metrics of social media sites used to disseminate messages?
- Does polling and media analysis reveal a correlation between public opinion and social media metrics?
- Is there a correlation between social media interaction and changing opinions?
- What is the correlation between opinions expressed on social media sites, public opinion polls, and traditional media opinions?
- Is there evidence of social media content transferring to other mediums?
- What is the degree and frequency of transfer?
- Are these indicators confirmed by other sources?

Source: Adapted from James Kinniburgh and Dorothy Elizabeth Robling Denning. "Blogs and Military Information Strategy".

Subjective Assessments

The basic building blocks of social media provide a subjective measure of influence. Building relationships through interaction with individual members of the audience creates the credibility and trust required for influence. The efforts of the Digital

---

[41] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 17.
[42] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 25, 26.
[43] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 26.

Outreach Team (DOT) at the Department of State and the Digital Engagement Team (DET) at USCENTCOM rely on creating relationships with individual audience members. Initially the audience tends to dismiss US views and explanations. Changes in the mode of interactions from dismissal to debating the merits of the views presented provide a limited measurement of influence. These signs are subjective based on the perception of the US analyst, and restricted to the limited number of interactions the analysts are able to complete daily. Still, the acceptance of US views as credible and worthy of debate represents a change from derision to basic respect by the selected audience. Instead of just talking past each other, the DET is learning about the audience as well as attempting to influence. Even more encouraging is the fact that for every audience member actively engaged there are likely many reading the conversations that choose to remain silent. Robert Axelrod's theory of cooperation supports the view that low-level interactions starts the cycle of reciprocation. Axelrod observed that even in an atmosphere of enmity, small and insignificant actions of restraint started cooperation, which persisted because of the expectation of continued interaction based on mutually established norms.[44] Additionally, those individuals that do engage likely represent the nodes on influence within the wider audience.[45] Measuring the influence of social media begins with interactions at the individual level and manifests in the continuation and spread of relationships to other mediums.

The importance of measuring effects increases in an environment of constrained resources to establish priorities. Social media cannot take the place of traditional sources of influence; however, it performs a critical task in the emergence of cooperation. Without initial interaction, no mutual restraint emerges and no relationship exists to form the basis of the expectation of continued interaction. Mass messages cannot form a relationship with individuals in the selected audience and thus are only a momentary influence. Relationships continue the connection even where interests and views are opposed.

Summary

---

[44] Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 83.
[45] Edward B. Keller and Jonathan L. Berry, *The Influentials* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 1.

Chapter 5 started by downplaying the importance of the debate over which medium has the most influence and pointing to the actions of authoritarian regimes worldwide to establish the importance of social media in the overall US strategic communications campaign. The complexity of interaction between social media and traditional media complicates efforts to measure social media influence. Polling, surveys, and interviews transfer well from traditional media to social media where they cost less and expose facilitators to less risk. Additionally, focus groups, which mitigate some of the bias inherent in these measurement techniques, also increase measurement fidelity in social media. The competition for attention among audiences and messages leads to a focus on quantitative and qualitative measures of effects. Quantitative measures are often misleading and easily skewed by adversaries. Qualitative measures prove more robust especially when correlated with traditional measurement techniques and quantitative data. For social media the best measures of influence are those that focus on the basic building blocks, individual relationships. The enormous work force that would be necessary is a key reason that social media will never form the basis of a government driven influence campaign that achieves significant results. However, harnessing the energy of the US public, non-governmental organizations, and allied capacity to support a social media influence campaign may achieve significant results. To do so would require a relaxation of the tendency for centralized control and may require the violation of some sacred values. Chapter six will look at some of the ways that the US could exploit social media to counter violent extremist ideology.

Chapter 6

Application: Communicating With Social Media

> *"There is a war out there, old friend – a World War. And it's not about whose got the most bullets; it's about who controls the information. What we see and hear, how we work, what we think. It's about the information."*
>
> Cosmo to Martin Bishop, in Sneakers

The theoretical focus in the previous chapters emphasized the advantages that social media offers over traditional media. In the current chapter, a focus on the practical application of social media in the overall US strategic communication brings to light the difficulties of implementation. Social media relies on building lasting relationships from the ground-up. Large-scale efforts in social media would require enormous numbers of government employed communicators to create appreciable effects. This is just one example of the manifold difficulties in employing social media to achieve influence. Selected difficulties are highlighted in the following paragraphs along with how US strategic communications efforts in social media might overcome them.

The Human Scale of Social Media

Consider just the level of skill and knowledge required for competent engagement with the selected audience in social media, not to mention the language barrier. Individuals engaging on behalf of the US government must possess skills in constructing sound arguments and surviving in a debate, while at the same time remaining focused on the objective of positive influence.[1] In response, the adversary may use any tactics they desire without any need to remain responsible. The adversary may use culture jamming, a tactic that co-opts and satirically modifies government messages to mock the official communications efforts.[2] In these hit-and-run attacks, the author does not claim ownership specifically to avoid responsibility. Nevertheless, the adversary gains the benefit of publicity for their cause. The advantage for this type of frivolous assault as opposed to the more serious attacks is the enormous audience it attracts because of the

---

[1] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 21.

[2] Mark. Dery, "The Merry Pranksters and the Art of the Hoax," *The New York Times* December 23 1990, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE7DF123EF930A15751C1A966958260&pagewanted=all (22 March 2011). Culture jamming is normally directed at cooperate entities but applies to governments as well.

novelty. The size of the audience increases the potential for the incident to transfer to other layers of the information environment.[3] Not only do the individuals that communicate on behalf of the US government need to be well educated, thoroughly versed in US policy, and experts in the culture and language of their target audience, but media savvy as well. Finally these experts "must be trusted implicitly to handle the arguments" dynamically not simply following a standard scripted response.[4] Even if a large number of such individuals were available, just the cost of employing them and organizing their efforts would become truly daunting.

Overcoming the Human Scale

It may be just as well that they are not available because it may force the US to rely on everyday citizens, non-governmental organizations, and allies. These assets may augment and complement a small core of dedicated US communicators larger than the current efforts, but not exceeding manageable levels. This would require two changes. First, strict control of the message would not be possible when various organizations and foreign governments joined the effort. Policy makers long ago recognized the need for expanding US communications capacity and elevating credibility with the selected audience through partners and allies.[5] The lag in implementation demonstrates the difficulty of putting into practice this type of policy and the institutional resistance to relinquishing central control of the message. Relinquishing control to independent third party validators to boost credibility with the selected audience requires accepting risk.[6] The benefits in terms of increased communications capacity and credibility, however, outweigh the risk of crossed messages and the risk of allowing the third party criticism to constrain US behavior. Secondly, the core capacity of dedicated communicators would grow slowly to a larger yet manageable level. A manageable level, an imprecisely defined quantity, is likely in the hundreds of communicators but not the thousands. Unfortunately, for the scope of this project the number of social media communicators recommended will remain ambiguous because it will ultimately reflect the size and

---

[3] Peretti, "My Nike Media Adventure," 20.

[4] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 21.

[5] Douglas J. Feith, "Freedom, Safety and Sovereignty." Speech. Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 17 February 2005.

[6] Collings, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 39.

ferocity of the enemy as well as the international environment more than current US capacity to communicate. The characteristics of future conflicts, the information environment, and the state of technology available at the time will determine the assets required. This is indeed a question suitable for further investigation.

Expanding Current Efforts

The US should continue and expand ongoing efforts at DOS and USCENTCOM to counter misinformation and challenge violent extremist ideology in social media. Creating a large bureaucratic structure to manage these efforts is likely counterproductive, because the social media audience will resist what they would likely perceive as government takeover of the medium.[7] "The idea of a blogging corps could backfire … the medium is not designed for organizations, it is designed for individuals. And if users think: 'Hang on here, this is the government intruding into our sites' – this could seriously compromise the effort."[8] Instead, small teams, like the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) and Digital Engagement Team (DET), should continue to operate independently while encouraging a larger group of like-minded individuals, US and foreign, to engage as well. The DOT and DET teams then serve as the nucleus of a larger effort. The US will not have complete control, but will still be able to influence the debate using the core DOT/DET efforts.[9] The larger like-minded audience will pick up and amplify what the DOT and DET creates broadcasting the message in cyberspace.[10] These efforts will achieve many of the same objectives as a large social media blogger core writing on behalf of the government. At the same time because they are not directly associated and sometimes express opinions contrary to the official US policies, third party validators will retain greater credibility with foreign audiences.[11] How can social media change ideas? Social media changes ideas when person-to-person contact establishes credibility, and allows communicators to explain the US perspective.

---

[7] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 36.
[8] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 36.
[9] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 37.
[10] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 37.
[11] ———, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 38.

Ongoing dialogue perpetuates the relationship, allowing communicators to provide facts to counter erroneous information, and gather feedback to guide future strategic communications efforts in traditional and social media.

Change from Reactive to Proactive engagement

The current DOT and DET analysts operate in a reactive mode, which achieves a limited impact. The mission of the DOT is to "[E]xplain US foreign policy and counter misinformation" by providing accurate information and descriptions of American life.[12] While the DET at USCENTCOM is sometimes more aggressive in countering extremist ideology, both teams react to posted content.[13] Both teams should expand their current efforts to include proactive measures designed to counter future adversary messages. Taking the initiative in engagement could push adversaries to use more extreme rhetoric. Adversary desperation would likely alienate more of the audience than it would attract. Proactive engagement requires advance knowledge of adversary plans and intent. Intelligence assessments and covert social media surveillance could provide the necessary advance knowledge; however, other agencies should conduct these activities. Associating the DOT and DET with covert activities would reduce their credibility and may require actions that go beyond exploitation of current legal ambiguities.

Preserve Legal Ambiguity for Social Media Influence Operations

The US should continue to exploit the ambiguities of international law with regard to information operations, especially those used for influence. In the future, legal regimes covering the use of cyberspace and social media specifically used to influence foreign audience may prove advantageous. Achieving an informed decision about the risks and benefits requires additional information, and practical experience. A rush to codify acceptable practices in social media may limit future US action. Additionally a legal regime governing influence operations would constrain the US but leave non-state actors undeterred. The US should continue research in the use of social media while

---

[12] United States Department of State, "The IIP Digital Outreach Team," ; United States Department of State, *Digital Outreach Team*, January 2009.

[13] Daniel Schuman, Deputy Director Digital Outreach Team, Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, interview conducted by phone 17 November 2010; Lt. Cmdr William Speaks (Digital Engagement Team Commander, United States Central Command, MacDill AFB, FL) phone interview by the author, 27 January 2011.

remaining open to negotiations over future regimes to regulate influence operations conducted in cyberspace. Research will assist negotiators in determining what is in the best interest of the US and continued involvement in negotiations will place the US in the best position to influence the result.

Expand Social Media Communication Efforts to Reduce Costs and Risks

Overcoming the hurdles outlined while integrating social media into the US strategic communications effort will also provide some significant benefits. Using social media reduces the costs of communicating with the audiences they reach.[14] Cost reduction results from the ease of modifying messages to fit the profile of even specific audience members. Additionally social media reduce the risk to communicators and audience members in the collection of feedback. The US strategic communication efforts should take advantage of these characteristics of social media to reduce the costs and risk of communication with the audiences social media reaches. This would require an expansion of current social media communication efforts from the current small teams at the DOS and USCENTCOM. Tailored social media messages would remain nested with the themes and messages in traditional media using the commercial concept of branding.

Changes in Thinking

Social media have changed the relative importance of traditional information and communication concepts. In arguing for an environmental approach to social media, Shirky points out the problems with the instrumental approach. "The instrumental view is politically appealing, [and] action-oriented ... It overestimates the value of broadcast media while underestimating the value of media that allow citizens to communicate privately among themselves. It overestimates the value of access to information … while underestimating the value of tools for local coordination. And it overestimates the importance of computers while underestimating the importance of simpler tools, such as cell phones."[15] While Shirky's overlooks the value of the instrumental approach to seed the social media environment he advocates, his view correctly points out the need for a change in thinking required to harness the power of social media. The necessary change in thinking respects the power of individuals to self organize, spread information through

---

[14] Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 48.

[15] Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2011): 31.

friends and acquaintances, and leverage simple communications tools to achieve results greater than state entities.

In some cases, the dominant conceptual frames used to respond to violent extremist ideology may also prove counter-productive. Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq turned into something different from what the planners intended, US government thinking has started to change. Nonetheless, David Kilcullen's apt paraphrase from the work of Bruce Hoffman bears repeating lest we forget we are at times our own worst enemy. "[W]hat hurts the targeted state (as distinct from the victims of the actual attack themselves) is not the direct effect of the terrorist attack itself but the "auto-immune response" of the threatened society and government in reaction to the attack, a response that alienates allies within and outside the targeted society, and inflicts far greater loss, cost, and damage (physical, political, and economic) than the terrorists themselves could ever directly impose."[16] Our adversaries desire the reaction more than the success of their cause. As Kilcullen points out the US should adopt a positive objective instead of just stating what US policies seek to prevent. In other words, "we know what we are fighting *against*, but not what we are fighting *for*?"[17] This prescription matches well with the positive objectives of social media influence.

The entire effort seeks to counter violent extremist ideology; however, it does so by building not just opposing. Building relationships, building communities, building will to resist the negative takfiri culture of chaos, destruction, and death.[18] Social media offers the counter insurgent the ability to respond both locally and globally. Kilcullen outlines these two sometimes-opposed objectives as major implications of his model 2 globalized insurgency thesis.[19] Kilcullen ultimately concludes that the globalized nature is ultimately possible for Al-Qaeda because of Western actions.[20]

---

[16] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 274.

[17] ———, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 274.

[18] Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 53. Takfiiri culture refers to those inspired by Sayyid Qutb's interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya. Taymiyya viewed some modern segments of Muslim society as living in jahiliyya, or a state of ignorance. This view allows the condemnation of modern Muslim society as kafir or infidel permitting excommunication or takfir. When this happens takfiri ideology holds that almost any means is permissible to restore the true Islamic faith.

[19] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 12.

[20] ———, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 21.

Social media offers the opportunity for counterinsurgents to work by, with, and through partners at the local level to improve governance and unite these efforts to counter the global Al-Qaeda propaganda themes.[21] Social media has the potential to unite local groups of resistance with others worldwide, in common opposition to violent extremism. Social media reduces the transaction costs that reduce the efficiency of sharing, cooperation, and collective action in other mediums.[22] The very base of support the global insurgency relies on may become the means to marginalize violent extremist ideology.

Understanding the Cognitive Conflict

Currently the US is involved in a seemingly intractable conflict with a worldwide group of loosely aligned individuals that use terrorism as their preferred tactic. The most visible terrorist group, Al-Qaeda, exhibits both the characteristics of a social movement and a hierarchy.[23] Their ideology conforms to a perversion of the Muslim faith, a paradigm that causes them to interpret events and in ways that are difficult for western viewers to understand. In fact the takfiri interpretation is likely difficult for the Majority of Muslims to understand because it also condemns faithful moderate Muslims.[24] We all construct paradigms that define the way that we experience the world around us. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Thomas Kuhn describes how normal science based on "achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges…as supplying the foundation for its further practice" forms a paradigm.[25] The paradigm "define[s] the legitimate problems and methods of a research field…" Individuals that join the scientific community learn the basics from the same models that formed the foundation

---

[21] Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 145; Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, 264. Axelrod provides a theory of cooperation that suggests a social structure allows groups to enter and thrive in hostile environments. Nice rules can invade a population of defecting rules by ensuring that they have a small percentage of interaction with other nice rules. Gladwell reinforces this notion by pointing out that being part of a team reduces the psychological impact of facing a daunting problem.

[22] Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 48, 49.

[23] Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 172.

[24] Gene W. Heck, *When Worlds Collide: Exploring the Theological and Political Foundations of the Clash of Civilization* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 60, 61.

[25] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

of the paradigm.[26] Their subsequent work conforms to the rules and standards and rarely provokes disagreements over the fundamentals.[27]

Religious beliefs that motivate some violent extremist ideology may operate in a similar way. Religious beliefs are one example of a paradigm that individuals use to understand events in the world around them. Religious ideologies change over time and are susceptible to manipulation by charismatic individuals. Even faiths such as Islam and Christianity that share similar foundational beliefs become instruments that support antithetical ideologies. Adherents to the faith become attracted to a particular set of ideas reducing the number of the faithful that espouse the ideas associated with the older school.[28] Some remain faithful to the older views and must then continue in isolation or join another group.[29] Those of one paradigm become unable to understand those of another because their fundamental points of reference do not overlap.[30] Once these incremental changes create distinct paradigms, an adherent of one school finds the other incomprehensible.[31] Agreement between the two then becomes nearly impossible. Scientists and the faithful both suffer from the absence of concrete reference points. The scientist must believe in what his instruments tell him just as the faithful must rely on what their beliefs tell them.[32] Neither can appeal directly to a common higher authority to resolve disputes.

Removing the Religious Component

To a certain extent, both the scientist and the faithful use their paradigm to form an identity. The scientist bases belief on reason and evidence while the belief of the faithful is largely impervious to reason. When shown contrary evidence, the scientist

---

[26] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 10.

[27] ———, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 11.

[28] ———, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 18.

[29] ———, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 19.

[30] ———, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 45. The takfiri modifications of Islam and extreme interpretation of Christianity form natural families. Between natural families, communication becomes nearly impossible because they lack a network of overlapping resemblances of ideas that permit mutual understanding and accommodation. Natural families may occur between languages when words in one language represent concepts that do not exist in the other or between belief systems with similar incompatibilities. For example, the trinity in Christianity (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit) does not have an equivalent concept in Islam and many Muslims would regard such a concept as blasphemy.

[31] ———, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 112.

[32] ———, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 114.

does not feel threatened personally. The scientist may feel professionally challenged, however, is more likely to investigate to find the source of the evidence regarded as anomalous. In other words, the scientist is more likely to change his paradigm based on evidence and reason. Without the ability to use reason and evidence as the basis of discussion, religious differences used as the basis for extremist ideology prove difficult to overcome. "[W]hen people consider things sacred, even if it's just bits of a wall or a few words … standard economic and political ways of deciding behavior in terms of costs and benefits fall apart."[33] In this case, a western initial reaction that favors weakening the power of the Islamic faith to combat violent extremism is counterproductive. The weakness of the larger moderate Muslim group allows the stronger bonds of small violent extremist organizations to dominate the actions of cohesive group members. Strengthening the influence of the norms espoused by the larger moderate Muslim population may provide a better counter to violent extremism.

Resist the Urge to React Predictably

Reducing the western tendency to oversimplify requires fighting the very tactic that violent extremists rely on. Groups employing terrorism to advance their violent extremist ideology prey on the weakness of democratic nations. Democracies faced with a terrorist threat tend to surrender to their constituencies and oversimplify the conflict, increasing the power of the insignificant terrorist action with their state response.[34] In order to respond more effectively to current and future threats the US may need to overcome some sacred values. Often US sacred values conflict with US interests preventing government action that could improve security. Any suggestion that the US government support Muslim organizations or religions based education meets with widespread opposition based on the US sacred value of church and state separation. However, support for Muslim religious education may serve US interests by strengthening Islamic norms against violence and marginalizing extremist groups. Strengthening religious related organization and values as opposed to government institutions drains the power of the extremist religious based ideology. Extremists may

---

[33] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*, 4.

[34] Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 118; Noblis, "Video of Audrey Kurth Cronin speaking at Noblis' Technology Tuesdays," http://www.noblis.org/NewsPublications/Pages/AudreyCronin.aspx. In her lecture, Kurth Cronin explains that democracies do not respond well in the short-term to terrorist threats because they tend to surrender to the desires of their constituencies.

easily vilify and mobilize the moderate base against an oppresive secular government but cannot do so with the same power against a religious based government system. In a similar fashion, creating power structures that respect local culture and traditions also deflates extremist rhetoric. Extremist groups easily rally a moderate base against outside influences but experience difficulty in opposing traditional power structures. Additionally, reducing the power that western state actions provide to violent extremist groups may require accepting additional risk. Leaders are unwilling to accept the certain political backlash that reducing security measures and accepting risk to US citizens would likely cause. Again western democratic sacred values of pliable politicians responsive to the desires of their constituencies conflicts with the overall interests of the US. Even where sacred values are in direct conflict and a compromise is not possible, cooperation for mutual benefit can emerge.

Using Social Media to Build Cooperation

Cooperation emerges from restraint and an expectation of continued interaction sustains the relationship, even without direct communication and in spite of enmity.[35] With this in mind, compromises on small issues may grow to enable larger agreements for mutual benefits with only symbolic compromise of sacred values by either side.[36] Economic and rational choice models do not contribute to solutions where sacred values are involved before addressing moral issues.[37] Progress on sacred values appears to represent a necessary condition for the acceptance of material inducements to continue the negotiation process.[38] In addition to top down government actions, new technologies may provide conduits that facilitate building relationships that provide bottom up support to collective actions.

Building relationships facilitates mutual understanding and may contribute to reducing conflict by providing relevant information to combat extremist ideologies. The Internet and social media tools reduce the transaction costs that previously inhibited communication and organization.[39] Social media operates on building relations at the individual level, and facilitates communication beyond the physical and temporal

---

[35] Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 78, 83.

[36] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*, 378.

[37] ———, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*, 375.

[38] ———, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*, 377.

[39] Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 48.

boundaries of traditional media. The merger of multiple communications technologies

supporting the production, transmission, and storage of content provides conduits for

delivery directly to individuals.[40] States are no longer able to regulate the flow of

information without resorting to draconian measures.[41] Is social media a disruptive

technology that will strengthen the state system by adding new users and modes of

interaction, or will social media weaken the international system that provides stability

creating more disruption than benefit?[42] Governments still have the power to control the

flow of information. Social media changes the cost and benefits of state to control

information but is not likely to disrupt the stability of the international state system.

Social media is a bottom-up approach to influence that may increase support for state

policies that favor compromise on sacred values by building relationships, credibility,

and trust.

Social Media: A Conduit for Transmission and Communication

Access to information and transmission of information are both far less important

than the opportunities for individuals to exchange information in the formation of

opinions. Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld in researching the formation of opinions

discovered a two-step process in the flow of communications.[43] The research revealed

that mass media might reach opinion leaders, those most influential in a particular group

or socioeconomic level; however, the communication and discussion of the ideas among

friends, family members, and colleagues drove the change of opinions.[44] Social media

serves both functions by transmitting information to the opinion leaders in the selected

audience and allowing the audience members to articulate and debate their views.[45]

Summary

Using social media for strategic communications presents many challenges;

however, the benefits of the medium outweigh the risks and costs. Social media allows

---

[40] Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, 2.

[41] Malone, "Speaking Out of Both Sides of Your Mouth: Approaches to Perception Management in Washington, D.C. and Canberra," 140.

[42] Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, 26.

[43] Elihu Katz and Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence; The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (Glencoe, Ill.,: Free Press, 1955), 32.

[44] Katz and Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence; The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*, 44, 45.

[45] Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media," 34.

the US to reach new audiences with greater agility than traditional media and gather better feedback to increase the effectiveness of influence campaigns. Social media cannot reach every audience and requires the communicator to assume risk in relinquishing control of the message. One to one contacts that form the basic building blocks of social media influence create relationships. These relationships may provide lasting effects where traditional media provides most transitory influence. The analysis in the preceding chapters reveals a number of implications for US strategic communications efforts using social. Examining these implications in the conclusion may provide some useful insights on the strategic utility of social media in the US strategic communications effort.

Conclusion

Social Media Implication for US Strategic Communications

All that we have to do is to send two Mujahedin to the farthest point East to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al-Qa'ida in order to make the generals race there to cause America to suffer human economic and political losses without their achieving for it anything of note other than some benefits to their private companies.

Osama bin laden, videotaped message, 2004

Perhaps the most compelling argument for paying attention to perception management is that America's adversaries, which do not really have the means to defeat the United States conventionally, have used and will continue to use perception management to weaken American resolve and commitment.

Pascale Combelles Siegel

The two quotes above outline the adversary prescription and tell us that information and ideas hold the key to perseverance if not victory. In the words of Scott Atran: "The terrorist agenda will likely extinguish itself altogether, doused by its own cold raw truth: It has no life to offer. This path to glory leads only to ashes and rot."[1] Bringing this reality to the masses susceptible to violent extremist ideology requires overcoming significant barriers of language, culture, and the perception of past and current US actions. Social media do not provide all of the answers; however, the US is overlooking their utility in the strategic communications campaign, a utility that increases with the growth and penetration of international communications technologies. The preceding analysis leads to some recommendations that may improve US strategic communications in social media. Perhaps the first question is what government entity should lead US strategic communications efforts?

Place the Department of State in the Lead for Social Media

To reduce the perception of threat and resistance to US messages in social media the US should place the DOS in the lead for strategic communications. Using the PA function instead of IO within in the DOD as CENTOM is doing represents a positive step, but not enough to separate the efforts from military force in the minds of the

---

[1] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*, 484.

international audience. One author on information operations worries that US Army capabilities and doctrine do not adequately support US communications efforts.[2] This betrays the false assumption that the US Army should or must support US strategic communications efforts. Perhaps this is true in wartime, but it is definitely a false assumption in peacetime. The article, of course, seeks to address what the DOD can do if called upon; however, perhaps the US relies on the DOD to communicate when other government agencies are more appropriate. Kilcullen succinctly summarizes the support for this argument: "Militarizing IO would be a severe mistake, which would confuse a part (military operations) with the whole (U.S. national strategy) and so undermine our overall policy."[3] The DOD should maintain IO capabilities for use in conflict but should not represent the US government to the wider world especially for long-term engagement. This means that the resources to support these efforts must also transfer from the DOD to the DOS. Control of the message is a second area with significant implications for strategic communications in social media.

Coordination Instead of Control

Strategic communications requires synchronization at the national level; however, US efforts may benefit from a relaxing of message control. The US government employs many intelligent articulate individuals with a desire to engage in constructive conversations through social media with foreign audiences. Many citizens may voluntarily lend their talents to such an effort as well. "According to Kathy Gill of the University of Washington, the most influential blogs were generally written by professionals with excellent writing skills."[4] "[W]aging the war against terrorism and its underlying causes … may require recruiting the prominent among the digerati (probably those native to the target location) to help in any Web-based campaign."[5] Finally, encouraging and supporting third party independent influencers precisely because of the fact that they are not controlled by the US increases their credibility with the selected audience.[6] For social media, the US may need to relinquish control of the message while

---

[2] Richter, "The Future of Information Operations," 103.
[3] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 299.
[4] Kinniburgh and Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 9.
[5] ———, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy", 9.
[6] Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, 107.

remaining synchronized around a common core narrative to maximize effects. There is no need for central hierarchal control; however, cooperation is essential to avoid wasted resources or even worse, message fratricide. Author Leigh Armistead argues that IO requires horizontal and vertical integration of government and private industry to ensure US success in the information arena.[7] To do so the US must adopt a stronger strategic narrative that sets appropriate left and right limits. Instead of a singular controlled message, US communications should mutually reinforce the tailored theme for the selected audience at each level.[8] Allowing US allies to have a voice in the creation of themes and messages may increase their interest in a positive outcome.

Leverage Partnership Capacity

The US must leverage the capabilities of partner nations to communicate through social media with populations susceptible to violent extremist ideology. "[S]uccessful strategic communications and cyber influence operations cannot be achieved by the United States acting on its own; allies and partners are needed both to shape our messages and so support theirs."[9] There is a risk of supporting messages adverse to US sacred values, but the benefits of countering violent extremism outweigh the determents to US values especially when such efforts secure US interests. Only politicians may undertake the task of explaining the risks and benefits of sacred value compromise to their constituents. In order to remedy a lack of regional experience and capacity, "[t]he US must pursue peacetime arrangements to develop multilateral resources and plan for their use in a crisis."[10] "While these challenges of conducting multilateral COIN must not be underestimated, the availability of information networks offers a way to make it happen, provided that the United States is willing to share far more information with all of its partners that it currently does."[11] Coordination with partners in peacetime builds confidence and trust necessary for success in a crisis. In addition to sharing the cost of

---

[7] Armistead, *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power*, 47.

[8] Collings, *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*, 42.

[9] Kramer and Wentz, "Cyber Influence and International Security," 343.

[10] Gompert and Gordon IV, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, 47.

[11] ———, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, 47.

influence efforts, partners bring regional expertise, cultural familiarity, and language skills that are difficult to buy at any cost.

Take Advantage of Reduced Transaction Costs

Social media, as a communication tool, reduces the transaction costs associated with sharing, cooperation, and collective action.[12] The reduction in costs to individuals may provide the ingredients that reduce the attraction of violent extremism when the majority perceives it as the problem instead of the solution. "Strategically, information power can help redefine the struggle with Islamic extremism from one of escalating violence to one of competing truth, from a potentially perpetual war of attrition to a winnable war of cognation."[13] The trend toward increasing use of mobile cellular technology may indicate that the freedom of individuals in the audience to communicate is becoming more important than the influence of messages directed at the audience.[14] Shirky argues for an environmental view that abandons attempts to influence the audience and instead concentrates on promoting general principles of freedom.[15] This approach is very much like a farmer tilling fields and waiting for crops without planting, fertilizing, or irrigating. There is no nucleus for the individual members to coalesce around and no way for them to change the context of the problem.[16] By expanding the current efforts of the Digital Outreach Team and Digital Engagement teams the US can provide the seed material essential to influence in Shirky's environmental model. The instrumental approach of DOT and DET helps win over a nucleus of individuals indigenous to the selected audience. These third party validators then become the core of an independent effort that takes advantage of Shirky's environmental approach. This model may combat violent extremist ideology on a local basis; however, countering the worldwide messages requires linking local efforts together.

Sponsor International Opposition Efforts

---

[12] Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 49.

[13] Gompert and Gordon IV, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, 125.

[14] Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media," 31.

[15] ———, "The Political Power of Social Media," 41.

[16] Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, 264. Gladwell write about how creating a team or just demonstrating to individuals that they are connected in a common endeavor changes the way that individuals view a problem. The task becomes less daunting when they know they are facing it as a team instead of as individuals.

The US may be able to use an environmental approach by providing support and initial material for a larger effort. Derk Kinnane suggests one such approach. "Simply put, the only really effective way would be to provide an international platform for those Muslims who seek to reconcile Islam and the modern world rather than to return to the 7th century."[17] In order to link together the disparate Muslim voices that are against violent extremism into an organization with worldwide reach able to combat the so-called Jihad International, the West would have to overcome some of its own sacred values. Kinnane writes that the Congress for Cultural Freedom set the precedent for such an organization when it "played an important role in the war of ideas with the international communist movement."[18] This movement however did not include a religious component. Many in the US would oppose the use of taxpayer dollars to support an overtly religious organization. For some US citizens their belief in separation of church and state would override the compelling US interest in combating violent extremism. Even if the majority of US citizens favored this approach, a vocal and hyperactive minority could prevent action unless politicians demonstrate firm resolve. This is not to argue that efforts to empower Muslims to combat extremists in their midst is futile. Simply, it illustrates how sacred values affect all sides of the issue, complicating work towards solutions. Horgan's work suggests building an alternate organization that challenges the violent extremist community of practice. The central goal of the alternate organization is "to provide a challenge to the identity of the committed members."[19] Of course, this will be difficult without challenging their religious conviction unless the alternate organization is also religious. Uniting indigenous opposition to violent extremism will likely require supporting overtly religious organizations. Navigating the cultural landscape may require US expertise in anthropology as well as commercial marketing advice to tailor and assess the effects of messaging efforts.

Marketing and Cultural Anthropology

---

[17] Kinnane, "Winning Over the Muslim Mind," 97.

[18] ———, "Winning Over the Muslim Mind," 97.

[19] John Horgan, *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement From Radical and Extremist Movements* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 148.

The US government should retain expertise in marketing and cultural anthropology to enhance social media influence operations.[20] Recognizing that the regional focus may change the predominant cultural characteristics of the selected audience, a contracting approach may prove more cost effective than training a permanent work force. Both marketing and cultural expertise enhance the effect of influence operations.[21] Concepts like segmentation and branding help refine the selected audience to conserve resources and unite tailored themes within an overall campaign. Successful influence campaigns require the skills of experienced marketing practitioners.[22] The US should train information operations professionals or contract with US and local national firms, to provide the necessary expertise.[23] Anthropology assists the construction of effective influence campaigns with an understanding of the motivations and desires from a cultural perspective.[24] Influence efforts should focus on using the moral and ethical force of the selected audience values and culture to turn individuals away from violent extremism. The users must feel like they are in charge to create online communities that the participants care about and will defend against those with violent extremist ideologies.[25] Basing the efforts on the characteristics of the selected audience provides a stable foundation for lasting effects; however, may not always results in favorable opinions of the US. In general, a greater appreciation of the selected audiences and techniques to reach them will enhance the effects of influence operations. Approaching these efforts with transparency and maintaining consistency, supports building audience trust that is necessary for successful engagement.

Overt Engagement is best for Long-Term Success

Deception often leads to anger or retaliation and inevitably erodes trust when discovered.[26] However, covert collection of information to monitor message impact and feed intelligence assessments provides feedback necessary for influence campaign success. While necessary at times to obtain advance knowledge of adversary themes and

---

[20] Kramer and Wentz, "Cyber Influence and International Security," 344.

[21] Richter, "The Future of Information Operations," 111.

[22] Trent and Doty III, "Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations," 74.

[23] ———, "Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations," 74.

[24] Richter, "The Future of Information Operations," 111.

[25] Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, 136, 137, 289.

[26] Pratkanis, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 66, 80. Influence relies on trust and credibility of the selected audience that the discovery of deception, trickery or connivance destroys.

messages, covert engagement activities should remain limited and isolated to specifically authorized government agencies. Covert engagements are risky as discovery destroys the credibility and audience trust essential to long-term influence.[27] The US should continue the current policy of overt social media engagement with clear identification of US communicators. This practice strengthens the international perception of US actions as consistent with international law and American ideals.

International Law for Information Operations

An international law covering state conduct in influencing international audience may prove advantageous at some future time. However, the current ambiguity in international law favors the US by allowing exploration of social media as an instrument of influence. Changes in communications technologies allow states to reach foreign audiences directly.[28] States retain the ability to control the flow of information, however, new technologies have changed the costs. States must use draconian measures to isolate their population from external information.[29] These changes threaten authoritarian states but represent just another source of information among many in democratic societies.[30] Exploitation of social media will likely provide information that could prove useful during any future negotiations by allowing representatives to evaluate the benefits and limitation of proposed rules. Entering into agreements with limited knowledge of what is possible in social media may limit US actions while leaving non-state actors unconstrained. At the same time, an intractable stance that precludes negotiation may prompt other parties to continue without US involvement. The result may create international norms disadvantageous to the US. The US should participate in negotiations to retain the current advantage and shape future international laws governing information operations.

Conclusion

The analysis in the preceding chapters focused on two questions. First, can social media change ideas? Second, if so what is the appropriate role of social media in US strategic communications efforts to counter violent extremism? US government

---

[27] ———, "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis," 66.

[28] Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, 2.

[29] ———, *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, 232.

[30] ———, *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, 230.

communication and commercial marketing support the assertion that engagement with individuals in social media changes opinions by building relationships. Social media represents an opportunity to counter violent extremist ideology as part of the overall US strategic communications effort. The utility of social media in countering violent extremist ideology merits expansion of the current US government efforts.

The US government is moving to use social media for strategic influence; however, the slow progress works to the advantage of our adversaries. The effects of social media interaction, like strategy, are cumulative.[31] A focus on short-term effects using traditional media may sacrifice the long-term opportunity "to create positive strategic effects at relatively low costs" with social media.[32] The US focus, remains transmission of messages and availability of information instead of engagement. The US should seek a proactive strategy in social media, one that studies, assesses, and attempts to anticipate changes in the information environment.[33]

US strategic communications strategies for social media should seek to influence and shape the future environment instead of continuing the current reactive mode.[34] Relationships create social media influence power not the medium as a conduit to the audience. A slow move into social media in the interest of caution may abandon the environment to our adversaries and create norms that are disadvantageous to the US. Current US communications strategy remains linked to broad considerations of the strategic communications environment where social media currently reaches a limited audience.[35]

Social media communications efforts should expand now in anticipation of audience expansion. With the current structure and emphasis, social media is likely to remain in a supporting role to the overall US strategic communication campaign. To create widespread effects, influence in social media must transfer to other layers of the

---

[31] Harry R. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2008), 41.
[32] Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century*, 41.
[33] ———, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century*, 17.
[34] ———, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century*, 17.
[35] ———, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century*, 18.

info sphere where new interest expands the audience and creates reinforcing attention.[36] Creating urgency in government circles to increase the speed of social media adoption likely remains hostage to the need to demonstrate results in order to justify the commitment of additional resources. Until decision makers view social media as a primary means to create influence, they will continue to view the medium as just a supporting effort.

---

[36] Scott, "Tempests of the Blogosphere: Presidential Campaign Stories that Failed to Ignite Mainstream Media," 10; Peretti, "My Nike Media Adventure," 19, 20. Scott references a proprietary slide show created by Professor Lance Bennett; however, Professor Bennett confirmed via e-mail that he linked the idea of media indexing, how power struggles and conflict help events transfer to other media layers, to the ideas media layers of Jonah Peretti.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Patrick D. *Information Operations Planning*, Artech House Information Warfare Library. Boston: Artech House, 2007.

Altman, Howard. "Central Command Uses Social Media to Respond to 'Enemy Propaganda'." *The Tampa Tribune* 22 October 2010, http://www2.tbo.com/ (accessed 8 December 2011).

Andreasen, Alan R. *Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995.

———. *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2006.

Armistead, Leigh. *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2004.

Arquilla, John, and David F. Ronfeldt. *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, 1997.

Atran, Scott. *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Ecco Press.

Axelrod, Robert M. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Rev. ed. New York: Basic Books, 2006.

Bandura, Albert. *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997.

Brenner, Susan W. . ""At Light Speed": Attribution and Response to Cybercrime/Terrorism/Warfare." *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* 97, no. 2: 379-475.

Brodie, Bernard. *Strategy In The Missile Age*. RAND ed. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp., 2007.

Caldwell, William B. I. V. LTG, and et al. "Learning to Leverage New Media: The Israeli Defense Forces in Recent Conflicts." *Military Review* vol 89 no 3 (2009): p2-10.

Christman, Gerard J. "Facilitating Stability Operations with Cyberpower." In *Cyberpower and National Security*, edited by Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr and Larry K. Wentz. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009.

Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence--How and Why People Agree to Things*. 1st ed. New York: Morrow, 1984.

Clausewitz, Carl von, Michael Eliot Howard, and Peter Paret. *On war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Collings, Deirdre. *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter: An Analytical Synthesis and Workshop Report*: US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, 2009.

Corman, Steven R., Aaron Hess, and Z. S. Justus. "Credibility in the Global War on Terrorism: Strategic Principles and Research Agenda." Arizona State University, http://comops.org/article/117.pdf, accessed 9 May 2011.

Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

United States Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms Joint Publication 1-02,* 12 April 2001.

United States Department of Defense, *Information Operations Joint Publication 3-13,* 13 February 2006.

United States Department of Defense, *Psychological Operations Joint Publication 3-13.2,* 07 January 2010.

Dery, Mark. "The Merry Pranksters and the Art of the Hoax." *The New York Times* December 23 1990, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE7DF123EF930A15751C1A966958260&pagewanted=all (accessed 22 March 2011).

Dunlap Jr., Charles J. "The Law and the Human Target in Information Warfare: Cautions and Opportunities." In *Cyberwar 3.0: Human Factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, edited by Alan D. Campen and Douglas H. Dearth, 137-151. Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 2000.

Dvorkin, Jeffrey A. . "How to Get on 'Talk of the Nation'." 25 April 2006 http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5363084 (accessed 23 March 2011).

Forest, James J. F., and Frank III Honkus. "Introduction." In *Influence Warfare: How Terrorists and Governments Fight to Shape Perceptions in a War of Ideas*, edited by James J. F. Forest. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009.

Fuller, Graham E. *The Future of Political Islam*. New York: Palgrave, 2003.

Gallagher, Paul. "Strategic Communications for the War on Terrorism, Countering Middle-Eastern Anti-American Bias." US Army War College, 2005.

Gerth, Jeff, and Shane Scott. "U.S. Is Said to Pay to Plant Articles in Iraq Papers." *The New York Times* 2005.

Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. 1st Back Bay pbk. ed. Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002.

Gompert, David C., and John Gordon IV. *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, Rand Counterinsurgency Study; Final Report. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp., 2008.

Hanson, Elizabeth C. *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, New Millennium Books in International Studies. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

Heck, Gene W. *When Worlds Collide: Exploring the Theological and Political Foundations of the Clash of Civilization*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

Helmus, Todd C., Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn. *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007.

Hollis, Duncan B. "Why States Need an International Law for Information Operations." *Lewis and Clark Law Review* 11, no. 4 (2007): 1023-2007.

Horgan, John. *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement From Radical and Extremist Movements*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Soldier and the State; The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. Cambridge,: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957.

International Telecommunications Union. "The World in 2010: ICT Facts and Figures." 2010, http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/FactsFigures2010.pdf (accessed 7 March 2011).

Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge studies in comparative politics. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Karlins, Marvin, and Herbert Irving Abelson. *Persuasion; How Opinions and Attitudes Are Changed*. 2d ed. New York,: Springer Pub. Co., 1970.

Katz, Elihu, and Paul Felix Lazarsfeld. *Personal Influence; The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Glencoe, Ill.,: Free Press, 1955.

Keller, Edward B., and Jonathan L. Berry. *The Influentials*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Kilcullen, David. *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Kinnane, Derk. "Winning Over the Muslim Mind." *The National Interest*, no. 75 (Spring 2004): 93-99.

Kinniburgh, James, and Dorothy Elizabeth Robling Denning. "Blogs and Military Information Strategy." JSOU Press, 16 March 2011,

https://jsou.socom.mil/JSOU%20Publications/JSOU06-5kenniburgdenningBlog_final.pdf, accessed 16 March 2011.

Kramer, Franklin D., and Larry K. Wentz. "Cyber Influence and International Security." In *Cyberpower and National Security*, edited by Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr and Larry K. Wentz, 343, 361 p. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009.

Kuehl, Daniel T. "From Cyberspace to Cyberpower: Defining the Problem." In *Cyberpower and National Security*, edited by Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr and Larry K. Wentz.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 3rd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Lewis, Justin. *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with it*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Liddell Hart, Basil Henry. *Strategy*. 2nd rev. ed. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Meridian, 1991.

Maddock, Richard C., and Richard L. Fulton. *Marketing to the Mind: Right Brain Strategies for Advertising and Marketing*. Westport, Conn.: Quorum Books, 1996.

Malone, Jeff and Liegh Armistead. "Speaking Out of Both Sides of Your Mouth: Approaches to Perception Management in Washington, D.C. and Canberra." In *Information Warfare: Separating Hype From Reality*, edited by E. Leigh Armistead. Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2007.

Miles, James. "Can Govermetns Control the Internet?" *BBC News* 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/623339.stm (accessed 15 MAY 2011).

Nawaz, Maajid. "We Must Not Stand by as Muslims Democrats Battle the Extremists." *The Telegraph* 17 March 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8389089/We-must-not-stand-by-as-Muslim-democrats-battle-the-extremists.html (accessed 25 March 2011).

Noblis. "Video of Audrey Kurth Cronin speaking at Noblis' Technology Tuesdays." http://www.noblis.org/NewsPublications/Pages/AudreyCronin.aspx.

Peretti, Jonah. "My Nike Media Adventure." *Nation* 272, no. 14 (2001): 19-22.

Petty, Richard E., John T. Cacioppo, and David Schumann. "Cnetral and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement." *Journal of Consumer Research* 10, no. 2 (1983): 135-146.

Pratkanis, Anthony R. "Winning Hearts and Minds: A Social Influence Analysis." In *Information Strategy and Warfare: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, edited by John Arquilla and Douglas A. Borer. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Pratkanis, Anthony R., and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*. Rev. ed. New York: W.H. Freeman, 2001.

Prochaska, James O., and Carlo C. DiClemente. "In Search of How People Change Applications to Addictive Behaviors." *American Psychologist* 47, no. 9 (September 1992): 1102-1114.

———. "Stages and Processes of Self-Change of Smoking: Toward An Integrative Model of Change." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 51, no. 3 (1983): 390-395.

Quilliam. "Why Quilliam?" http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/why-quilliam.html.

Richter, Walter E. "The Future of Information Operations." *Military Review* vol 89 no 1 (2009): p103-113.

Robinson, Phil Alden. "Sneakers." United States: Universal Pictures, 1992.

Schelling, Thomas C. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge,: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Schmitt, Michael N. "Bellum Americanum: the U.S. View of Twenty-First Century War and Its Possible Implications for the Law of Armed Conflict " *Michigan Journal of International Law* 19 (1998): 1051-1090.

Scott, Travers D. "Tempests of the Blogosphere: Presidential Campaign Stories that Failed to Ignite Mainstream Media." University of Washington, 2005.

Seib, Philip. "CENTCOM's Digital Engagement Tries to Counter Extremists." *The CPD Blog* August 26, 2010, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/centcoms_digital_engagement_tries_to_counter_extremists/ (accessed 16 March 2011).

———. "Public Diplomacy and Counterterrorism." 16 September 2010, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/public_diplomacy_and_counterterrorism/ (accessed 8 December 2010).

Shirky, Clay. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*. New York: Penguin Press, 2008.

———. "The Political Power of Social Media." *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2011): 28-41.

Shulman, Mark R. *Legal Constraints on Information Warfare*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Center for Strategy and Technology Air War College Air University, 1999.

Siegel, Pascale Combelles. "Perception Management: IO's Stepchild?" *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 13, no. 2 (Autumn 2005): 113 - 134.

Silverberg, Daniel, and Col Joseph Heimann. "An Ever-Expanding War: Legal Aspects of Online Strategic Communication." *Parameters* vol 39 no 2 (2009): p77-93.

Skoudis, Edward. "Evolutionary Trends in Cyberspace." In *Cyberpower and National Security*, edited by Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr and Larry K. Wentz. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009.

Sonck, Nathalie, and Geert Loosveldt. "Making News Based on Public Opinion Polls: The Flemish Case." In *Public Opinion and the Challenges of the 21ST Century*. Berlin, 2007.

United States Department of State, *Digital Outreach Team,* January 2009.

Stelnzer, Michael. "Reaching Millions With Twitter: The Whole Foods Story." *Social Media Examiner* 9 Feburary 2010, http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/reaching-millions-with-twitter-the-whole-foods-story/ (accessed 23 March 2011).

Stony Trent, and James Doty III. "Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations." *Military Review* 85, no. 4 (2005): 70-74.

"Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation." *The Washington Post* 20 September 2001, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html (accessed 3 May 2011).

"Transcript: Translation of Bin Laden's Videotaped Message." *The Washington Post,* 1 November 2004, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16990-2004Nov1.html (accessed 8 March 2011).

Trent, Stony, and James Doty III. "Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations." *Military Review* 85, no. 4 (2005): 70-74.

Treverton, Gregory F., and Seth G. Jones. *Measuring national power*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005.

U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, Public Law 80-402, U.S. Code 22 (1948).

United States Department of State. "The IIP Digital Outreach Team." January 2009, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/116709.pdf (accessed 23 January 2011).

Wingfield, Thomas C. "International Law and Information Operations." In *Cyberpower and National Security*, edited by Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart H. Starr and Larry K. Wentz, 525-542. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press: Potomac Books, 2009.

Yarger, Harry R. *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2008.

Zimet, Elihu, and Edward Skoudis. "A Graphical Introduction to the Structural Elements of
    Cyberspace." In *Cyberpower and National Security*, edited by Franklin D. Kramer, Stuart
    H. Starr and Larry K. Wentz. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press:
    Potomac Books, 2009.